

THE INFANCY OF RELIGION

BY

D. C. OWEN, M.A.

RECTOR OF STOKE ABBOTT

Πάντες γὰρ ἄνθρωποι περὶ θεῶν ἔχουσιν ὑπόληψιν, καὶ πάντες τὸν
ἀνωτάτῳ τῷ θείῳ τρόπον ἀποδιδόασιν.—ARISTOTLE, *de Coelo*.

HUMPHREY MILFORD

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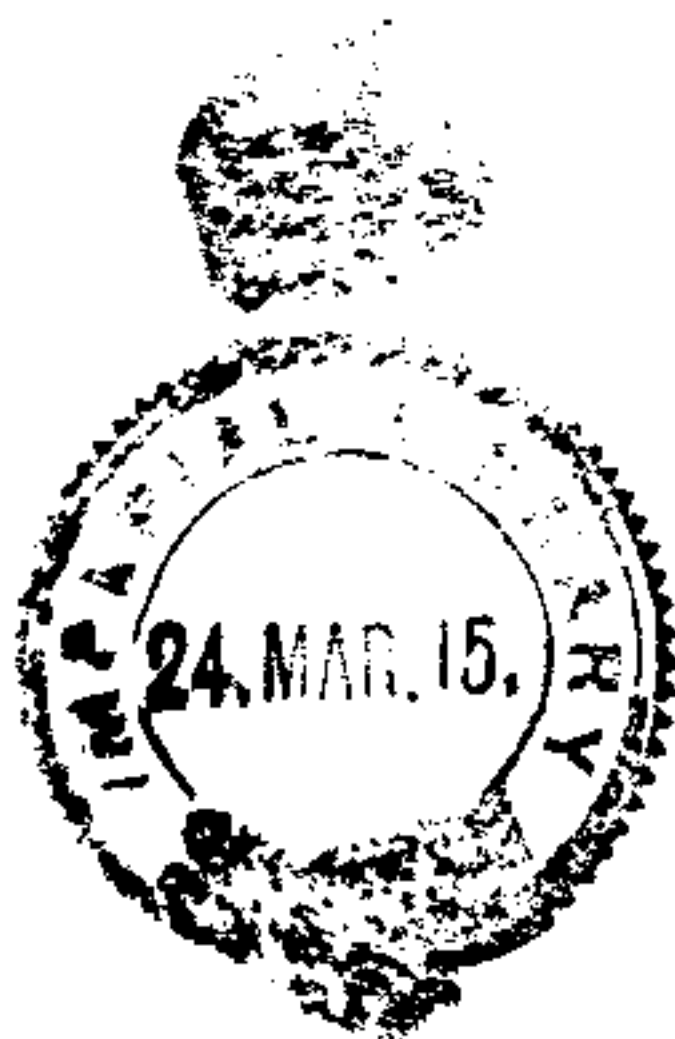
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PREFACE

IN this little book there are presented some results of a study of religion in its most primitive and rudimentary forms. I was drawn to the subject by the curiosity to know whether religion could legitimately be called an instinct of human nature. Is it as much of the essence of man as, for example, the gift of speech? Or is it something that he acquired in the course of his history, as he learned the art of making a boat to carry him across a river?

These questions may doubtless be answered best by an examination of the ideas and usages of people who live in a state of nature, and have not yet been subjected to the modifying influences of civilization. If religion is universal among them, there are strong grounds for thinking that it has its roots deep down in the very constitution of mankind, and that it will remain their inalienable possession as certainly as the power of sight. For my own part, after spending some time on the study of early religion, I am more convinced than ever of the reality of the religious sense, and of the tenacity of its hold upon primitive folk. They all have

religion of a kind, and this fact makes one feel that the religious belief of the more advanced Christian people has a sound and solid foundation in their nature. Personally I am cheered by the fact. I am encouraged in my work of Christian teaching, confident that no genuine religious appeal can be in vain.

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CHAPTER I

MAN AND NATURE

THE student of religion in its earliest phases has a wide field open for his labours. On the one hand, he must obtain some acquaintance with the religious beliefs and practices of our own European ancestors. On the other, he must inquire into the strange rites and uncouth theories prevailing to-day in districts whose inhabitants have hardly as yet succeeded in taking the first step in the march of civilization. It is also more or less incumbent upon him to notice the religious impulses and aptitudes of the civilized child as they display themselves in the course of his growth to maturity.

From the beginning man has stood over against nature in her various moods and manifestations. From the beginning he has been forced to recognize the fact and to think about it. His early ideas, however crude and unedifying, are nevertheless of sufficient interest to justify the attempt to explain and interpret them. At the outset we may confess the hopelessness of obtaining anything like direct information about our earliest ancestors. No traces even have been left of their movements and doings, so that the investigator, when he is setting out in quest of some clue to their condition and their ideas of the world, is like a man groping in the dark.

It is very little indeed that is known about the palaeolithic men of Europe, and these, it will be acknowledged,

are modern in comparison with the first few groups of men who saw the light of the sun. Are we therefore to leave the people of the long, long ago alone in the silence that encompasses them? There would be no other option were there not races in the world to-day, who seem in belief and practice to be just starting on their career upward from the lowest level possible to *human* beings. And probably one would not be far wrong if he put our prehistoric ancestors in the same class with them. They are to all appearance parallel cases, and hence, if any light is to be thrown on the condition of our own forefathers in *primaeval* times, it must come from an inquiry into the conduct and beliefs of primitive people on the globe to-day. To these rude people the student therefore goes for the information he requires. But the information is not so easily obtainable as one might think. There are many obstacles and barriers to be overcome before reliable knowledge of the ideas and practices of backward races is reached. The savage is a secretive being, somewhat reluctant in opening his heart to a stranger. It is the experience of missionaries and travellers that it is by no means an easy task to prevail upon him to divulge the tribal beliefs and customs.

In regard to such matters he is extremely reticent and uncommunicative. It is also possible that the information which he gives to the white man may be falsified by the desire to be pleasing and obliging to him. On the other hand, should he feel in a communicative mood, he is hindered by the poverty of his language from making explicit in words the ideas and practices in vogue among his people. Yet in spite of these difficulties which would

seem to be insurmountable, a large mass of facts has been accumulated, and is now accessible in the writings of well-known anthropologists and missionaries.

It will be conducive to clearness if the subject of this chapter is divided into two sections, and considered under two headings.

1. In the first section notice will be taken of such familiar and tangible products of nature as animals, fish, and plants, and of the manner in which they affected man, and *pari passu* of the attitude which he in consequence felt it appropriate to assume towards them. Our study will be all the simpler if we try to banish from our minds any *a priori* assumption that he treated the lower creatures as we do, with some amount of disdain and contempt, or that he regarded them all as standing on a level lower than his own. If the human being has always been the finest and most developed product of GOD'S creation, early man was not conscious of the fact. Surrounded as he was by creatures surpassing him in cunning, strength, and fleetness he dared not be so bold as to deem himself lord of all created things, and to view them as existing for the sole purpose of ministering to his wants. The very qualities which gave many of them an advantage over himself called forth his deepest appreciation and respect. The strength, agility, and craft of the animal raised it high in his estimation; and any of his fellows who happened to possess these qualities in an exceptional degree was forthwith promoted to authority in the clan. The only ground on which the chief or headman amongst the Andaman Islanders claims his office is that of superior daring, wisdom, success in war

or in hunting. His authority is not derived from his father or any other relative of distinction, but solely from his own prowess and efforts.¹ Respect for the cunning and fearless creature, be it human or animal, flows spontaneously from the heart of primitive man, who is only too well aware of the value of courage and astuteness to himself.

But man cannot remain fondly admiring the capacities of the animal at a distance. His craving for food is not stilled in that way. A few of the animals he has no trouble to catch and kill. Others are more elusive, more dangerous, and it requires some skill on his part to lure them within his grasp. He had for ages to fend for himself as well as he could, and strive manfully in his quest for food. The prey which falls into his hands with little trouble may not be so abundant, and so he is compelled to try conclusions with the more ferocious and elusive beasts. Here is a store of meat flesh for him if he can find how to grasp it. Physical strength will help him but little, for the animal is more than a match for him in that respect. Are there any other means at his disposal? A happy idea strikes him. He may play upon the feelings of the brute, for that it has feelings is certain. He may humour it, cajole and win it over by showing kindness to it, by acting discreetly and prudently when going hunting or fishing. A modicum of wisdom will succeed where strength of arm will fail,—that is the belief of the huntsman and the fisherman in primitive society.

This is a point on which it is necessary to dwell at

¹ *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, art. Andamans, vol. i.

some length. The animal has certain susceptibilities and feelings, and even perceptions, and powers of the tongue analogous to those of man himself. Was it after man had made this discovery that he began the process of taming animals? At any rate, after guessing to his own satisfaction 'the mind and ways' of the brute, after reading its character as it were, he was in a better position to make himself agreeable and acceptable in his dealings with it. If he knows what is agreeable or otherwise to it, he can so arrange his hunting or fishing methods as not to jar on its feelings. He is in fact in possession of a secret enabling him to insinuate himself into its goodwill and thus entice it to himself instead of offending it and driving it away. What a profitable investment he has made when he has succeeded in ascertaining 'the mind and ways' of the animal! He has not, as Browning would say, merely rendered it 'placable',¹ but he has secured large returns of interest in the shape of prey. The Dog-clan of the Torres Straits had special influence over dogs because they understood the habits of dogs; but the members of the Octopus family in the New Hebrides had merely to go to the seashore and call out that octopus was wanted and a supply would come.² The long familiarity of the family with the octopus species had afforded them such opportunities of apprehending the ways of the species that a mere word of theirs could command a supply of it.

In the latter example the animal is merely *asked* to come, and no other ceremony is performed. The habit

¹ *Caliban upon Setebos*.

² J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 131.

of talking to the lower creatures is very prevalent in antiquity, while it is taken for granted that they not only listen, but are able to make a reply. The dumb animal is not dumb to primitive man, for it has a language of its own, and if he himself is incapable of understanding it, there are others of his fellows who can. The animal, it is true, does not make a habit of talking, at least to human beings, but that presents no difficulty to the savage. It is either too frightened or too lazy to speak. In Central Africa the monkey refuses to use his gift of speech from a fear that it may be put to do some work.

The folk-tales which recount conversations carried on once upon a time between man and beast are not the inventions of clever story-tellers, but faithfully reflect the beliefs of the simple people of the distant past. The four-footed beasts of the earth and the fowls of the air are viewed as beings possessing talking and perceptive faculties precisely like those of man himself, and as having similar likes and dislikes.¹ Bearing this fact in mind we are in a position to understand and appreciate the code of rules, or we may call it the etiquette, which prescribed the manner in which man was to approach, and overcome the reserve and reluctance of the animal. And any neglect of it would hamper him considerably when on a hunting or fishing expedition. His success in these undertakings did not depend so much on his own cleverness and prowess as on his observance of the rules which regulated his conduct towards the animal or fish. Before proceeding to catch game or fish, he passes through a number of preparatory exercises such as bathing,

¹ Cf. Hose and McDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, vol. ii, p. 101.

fasting, and other forms of abstinence, and he does this, not on his own account, but for the sake of placating his intended victim. Among the Huichol Indians the hunter cannot hope to catch the deer unless he has observed the rules of purity and continence. 'It is only the pure in heart that should hunt the deer. They would never enter a snare put up by a man in love; they would only look at it, snort "Pooh, Pooh", and go back the way they came.' 'The Indians of Nootka Sound prepared themselves for catching whales by observing a fast for a week, during which they ate very little, bathed in the water several times a day, sang, and rubbed their bodies.' 'Bangala hunters of the Upper Congo may have no sexual intercourse from the time they make their traps till they have caught game and eaten it; it is believed that any hunter who broke this rule of chastity would have bad luck in the chase'. These few instances selected almost at random from the abundance supplied in Dr. Frazer's book, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*,¹ are sufficient to mirror for us the sensitiveness and delicate perceptions with which early man invested the brute creatures of land and sea. They are attracted, they are rendered submissive by the performance on man's part of rules of decorum and cleanliness. We may call this transaction a species of magic, but if we do, we must remember that it is magic which concedes acute intelligence to the animal or bird or fish, for they can at once perceive whether the magical process is carried out correctly or not. The least oversight or remissness will be fatal to man's effort on land or sea to procure supplies.

¹ pp. 191 ff.

So primitive man everywhere thinks, and he strives to act up to his thinking.

The animal is human in everything but in outward shape and form. If further proof of this thesis were needed, it is found in the inveterate belief of early people that they are all descended from some animal ancestor, and that after the lapse of ages they managed to slough off the external and visible marks of the beast. The Turtle-clan in Borneo had as their ancestor a turtle, which succeeded in shaking off its shell and assuming the erect human form, and handing on the changed form and posture to its descendants.¹ The conclusion of the whole matter is seen in the remarkable fact that the preparation man made before hunting was similar to that he made before going to war. The preliminary exercises which the huntsman had to undergo were on all fours with those to which the warrior had to submit before venturing on the arduous and dangerous task of killing human beings. The animal, in so far as both mental and psychical gifts are concerned, stood on practically the same footing as the human stranger or enemy. They were both put in the same category, and were, therefore, approached with like caution and preparation. The *humanity* of the animal emerges, perhaps, into the greatest prominence just at the moment when it is being slain. Man performs the work of killing with all due respect for the victim's feelings, fearing lest its spirit should henceforth trouble him, or lest the whole species should avenge the death of their fellow by withdrawing altogether from the slayer and letting him starve. It is

¹ Cf. F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, pp. 103 f.

of the utmost importance then that he should do everything possible to reconcile the animal to its fate and disarm its wrath. The bear was gently spoken to before it was killed in the north-west of Canada; and so was the first salmon of the season ceremoniously addressed before it was eaten. The shaman 'lays rods on the right lateral fin of the salmon, the side fins being regarded as the salmon's hands. The rods bear the totem names and marks of the elders of the tribe. The shaman introduces the rods to the salmon by name, saying, "This is So and So who desires to welcome you"'.¹ Being a sensible and a sensitive creature the salmon was less likely to bear ill will to its slayers by being thus humoured. The plant again possessing food properties should not be cut down and eaten anyhow. It was like the animal, a sensitive being, which had some respect for its life, and so the savage was careful how he treated it. The natives of North-West Canada used to hold a service in connexion with the annual gathering of the succulent shoots of the wild raspberry. 'The medicine man, conducting the ceremony, silently invokes the spirit of the plants, the tenor of his prayer being that it will be propitious to them, and grant them a good supply of suckers.'²

With this evidence before us it may be confidently declared that the brute beast was not a *brute* to primitive man, but the repository of feelings and capabilities identical with his own. He comes near to it, he handles it nervously and cautiously, owing to its inherent powers not only of hearing, seeing, and feeling, but even of

¹ C. Hill-Tout, *British North America: The Far West*, p. 171.

² Ibid., p. 169.

understanding. In some respects the animal has the advantage over man, being endowed with qualities of which the latter is either wholly devoid or possesses in a less striking degree. The lion excels him in strength, the antelope in fleetness, the bird enjoys the gift of flight. Early man was vastly impressed by the exhibitions made by these privileged creatures and was fired with jealousy and envy. But he did not lie still gazing with admiration and envy on the talented classes of birds and beasts. Like the active and ingenious being that he was, he devised means for filching away from them the advantages in which they excelled and turning them to his own use. The means he actually employed was that of eating a portion of the flesh of these creatures, or of wearing on himself a bone or other part of their bodies. By so doing he was assimilating or transferring to himself their enviable qualities. The Abipones of Paraguay 'eagerly devour the flesh of the tiger (jaguar), bull, stag, boar, &c., having an idea that, from continually feeding on these animals, their strength, boldness, and courage are increased'. While, on the other hand, 'they refrain from eating hens, eggs, sheep, fish, imagining that these tender kinds of food engender sloth and languor in their bodies, and cowardice in their minds.'¹ Eskimo parents sew the skin from the roof of a bear's mouth into the caps of their boys, believing that they are thereby giving additional strength to them.²

The animal, then, was not always desired by man because he was hungry and anxious for flesh food. There

¹ A. C. Haddon, *Magic and Fetishism*, p. 10.

² See art. Charms and Amulets in *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*.

was another motive that put him on the track of the animal, and that was a desire for the courage, strength, and fleetness inherent in its flesh and blood. The animal was, indeed, empowered to minister to needs of his other than the craving for food. He alone of all inhabitants of the world had wants and deficiencies which could be intensely felt and cogitated upon. He was aware of his lack of daring and strength to attack and subdue his more powerful enemies. He felt the want of fleetness of foot to outrun his pursuers or to catch his prey. What remedy was there within reach which could heal his infirmities and mend his imperfections?

One unfailing source was the flesh of the highly-privileged beasts. If the beast was not available, or even when it was available, recourse was had sometimes to the plant. The plant was not always eaten for the sake of the food essence it contained. There was also a desire to appropriate its mysterious healing and strengthening virtues. The tree of life which imparts more life and vigour to the eater of it figures prominently in ancient folk-lore. In North India people used to chew the leaves of the sacred *nim* tree to ward off from themselves death and pollution.¹

We have been considering a practice which goes by the name of 'Sympathetic Magic', of which there are two varieties, the Contagious and the Homoeopathic, and it is remarkable how prevalent it is in early society. There is, in fact, scarcely any object having useful and desirable properties on which it is not made to operate. Even a human being is not exempted as material for its cruel

¹ F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 220.

exercise. His flesh, like that of the beast, serves more than one purpose. It is relished by the hungry man, and there are engrained in it the qualities which distinguished its owner in life. We shall here just touch on the subject of cannibalism for the light it throws upon primitive man's attitude to the lower creatures. Cannibalism in all probability arose in most parts of the world when the inhabitants were at their wits' ends in the matter of food supply. The temptation to eat the old and infirm within the clan, and the bodies of enemies would then be irresistible. In countries where there is a scarcity of provisions, it may be noticed, cannibalism is rampant. There is a striking example of this in the life of the blacks of Australia.¹ Any fear they may have of the ghost of the dead man, or any instinctive feeling of abhorrence they may have to the eating of the flesh of a kindred being, is not potent enough to deter them in their famishing condition from feasting on a corpse.² What chiefly told against the repulsive practice within the tribal circle was the belief in the sacredness or inviolability of the life of every member. The whole community is closely welded together, for every member of it is united to his fellows by the tie of kinship, so that his life is really a part of their own, and therefore the preservation of it is a duty devolving upon the whole body. The sense of blood relationship protested against cannibalism, if it did not effectually prevent it.

The question of importance now is this. The practice of eating human flesh having arisen in periods of scarcity,

¹ Cf. D. G. Brinton, *Primitive Religions*, p. 25.

² Cf. *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii, p. 194.

some other reason had to be assigned for it, some other excuse for it found in times of plenty. Early man did not have to look far before discovering a plausible motive for eating human flesh. On the analogy of the flesh of other beings, beasts, birds, and fish, the flesh of man must be the vehicle of something more valuable than food properties. If it were not so, a mother in Queensland would not eat her child 'to get back the strength she had given it'.¹ 'Some Victorian tribes kill their new-born children, eat them, and give them to their elder children to eat, believing that the latter will thus possess the strength of the babes in addition to their own.'² Some tribes in North Australia eat the cheeks and eyes of their enemies to make them brave.

We shall not pursue this subject further at present, but at this point the question involuntarily arises whether the origin of sacrifice may not be traced to this belief in the transference of certain qualities from the flesh and blood of a human or animal victim to man. The animal, it is certain, is slain and eaten by the savage for other purposes than that of gratifying his appetite. He has other instincts and desires which he tries to satisfy by eating flesh. If the animal is divine it is eaten for the sake of appropriating its divinity. But is the animal divine? Has it powers more than human, powers which from the point of view of the savage are supernatural? That is a question which will be answered in some detail in another chapter. We shall give but one instance which seems to suggest an answer in the affirmative. The

¹ *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii, p. 198.

² J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 74.

Central Australians, whose beliefs and practices have been carefully investigated by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen, are among the most degraded on the face of the globe. By them a solemn ceremony is performed every year at spring time, with the intent of increasing the supply of the animal species which the officiants regard as their totem. The totem animal is killed and parts of its flesh are eaten by the chief and the people that are with him. At the ceremony it is their bounden duty to consume small portions of the victim, whereas on other occasions they have to refrain from eating the flesh of the totem altogether. If the emu bird be the totem of a certain group of people, then emu birds are as food prohibited to them.¹ Why then are they allowed to eat morsels of its flesh at the spring ceremony? Because without doing so they would be disqualified for carrying out the purpose of the solemn gathering, which is to multiply the number of emu birds. 'To eat none would have the same effect as to eat too much; that is to say, if the men of a totem did not eat a little of it they would lose the power of multiplying their totem.'² The feature of the ceremony interesting to us is that the head-man and his fellows obtain their qualification for influencing or controlling an animal species by devouring a piece of the animal's flesh. In other words, the animal imparts to them the super-human capacity for bending nature, or a part of nature, to their will.

2. It now remains to enter on a brief discussion of

¹ B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *Native Tribes of Central Australia*, pp. 179 ff.

² J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 230.

man's attitude to another side of nature. When confronted with the mighty forces of inanimate nature, such as rain, wind, sea, sun, and moon, or unusual appearances and sounds, such as comets, eclipses, lightning and thunder, it was impossible for him to abstain from fashioning theories about them. In the view of early man these are not blind, unconscious, and unheeding forces, moving on relentlessly in their work of destruction or blessing. That there was some intelligence behind them, primitive man never doubted. The wind, or the sea, knew what it was itself doing. The devastations wrought by the storm were not the work of a being without intelligence, and so it is held by the savage responsible for the havoc it makes, just as a piece of furniture is blamed by the child for hurting him. Primitive man is child enough to feel that whatever does him harm is a living spiteful thing. And with the child's wrathful mood he will hit back if he can.

The Guaycuras of Paraguay, when visited by severe storms, thinking that it was an attack upon them by evil spirits, marched forth against them, brandishing their clubs and raising the war-cry.¹ In South Africa, when the natives saw a storm coming, they used to climb a hill in the neighbourhood and attempt to frighten it away. The early Celts viewed high tides as living giants, who threatened evil to them, and in their impetuosity rushed waist-deep into the water, and endeavoured to crush the giants.² This method of dealing with the great, arresting forces of nature does not, however, seem to have been

¹ E. Clodd, *Animism*, p. 50.

² J. A. MacCulloch, *Religion of Ancient Celts*, p. 179.

usual. Man, ignorant though he be, soon finds out that the policy of force is of no avail against those giants. The elements pursue their course remorselessly in spite of his puny efforts to stop them. What is he to do? Is he to adopt the attitude of abject submissiveness, to bear patiently the blows and buffets of these uncanny and mysterious enemies?

Early man is fairly resourceful, and does not cast long about before finding means to control the elements. In his distress he turns to the clever person, the magician or shaman. The arts of these men of superior knowledge are more powerful than the sword. When a storm is blowing there is offered them an opportunity for exercising their cunning artifices and winning distinction for themselves.

The magician wielded an enormous power in early society. It was often believed that there was hardly any limit set to his influence not only over men, but even over the elemental forces of nature. He could command rain, sunshine, or wind by his secret art: In Central Australia there are entire groups or classes that enjoy this privilege. 'The Crow-men in addition to looking after crows had to take charge of lightning, thunder, &c.;—the black Cockatoo-men had to extend the sphere of their operations to the sun, the wind, and the seasons.'¹ Here then in the person of the magician there was discovered what appeared to be an effective bulwark against the alarming and destructive phenomena of heaven and earth, and a handy lever for regulating the elements precisely in

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 136.

accordance with people's demands. 'The arrow that flieth by day, the pestilence that walketh in darkness, the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day,' are all subject to his direction.

We are thus apparently left with the impression that the magician is the most potent agent in the universe, and that no emergency can arise to which he is not equal. That impression, however, will be removed if we sift the facts bearing on our subject more carefully. In Central Australia, where magic reigns supreme, the aborigines are not altogether godless. If they have no *real* gods, they have *imaginary* ones, or what might be termed 'bogies'. The bogies exist, it is said, for the sole purpose of keeping the women and children in order. The adult section of the males do not believe in them. It is only the women and children who are kept labouring under the delusion that the bogies are real beings.¹ A parallel case is that of the Ona Indians of Tierra del Fuego, who find it to their interest to practise a similar deception. They have 'bogies' in which they themselves do not believe, but which are 'a strong moral aid in dealing with refractory wives and wilful children'.² Admitting for the moment that the natives have invented these bogies, is it likely that they would have invented them if the magician was omnipotent? If his arts are so successful in moderating the fierceness of the elements, or in summoning them when they were wanted for the good of man, they surely are competent to check and prevent the disorderly

¹ B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, pp. 502 ff.

² J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 147.

behaviour of the women and children. What need then of bogies?

The truth of the matter is that the magician was deemed a tower of strength to primitive people, but nevertheless there were numerous things that he could not do, and he was not the *quo nihil majus* of the universe even in the estimation of his own people. He would hardly venture to set his magical machinery working for the production of rain at a time of the year when rain was not expected. Messrs. Spencer and Gillen in their tour across Australia saw among the Urabunna tribe the rain-making official engaged in trying to bring down the rain, and they actually saw the results of his labours in a downpour, but they observe that it was the usual time of the year for rain to fall in that part of the country. The magician was after all no more than a clever man, who was dexterous enough to turn opportunities and occasions to account. He was not coercing the elements, but co-operating with them. This may well be explained by a story drawn from Dr. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. The Sun addressed himself to an Ojibwa youth. 'There are among you, in the lower world, some whom you call great medicine men; but it is because their ears are open, and they hear my voice, when I have struck any one, that they are able to give relief to the sick.'¹ Whether the magician or doctor was always *conscious* that he was working hand in hand with the formidable ministrants of nature is another matter. At times perhaps he was; at other times he deluded himself with the idea that his own efforts alone produced

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 354.

the wonderful result, and that he should get the sole credit for it.

We may at once set aside the notion that the magician is so rich a treasury of powers and capacities of every kind that there is no fitter object for worship in or out of the earth. A limit could not fail in the long run to be put by the savage to the ability of his magician, however arrogantly the latter vaunted and paraded it. And when the power of the magician is reduced within measurable limits, his fitness as an object of worship is gone. Sometimes the magician enjoys more or less absolute sway in a district, but this is not by reason of his own inherent gifts. He owes his pre-eminent position to the belief that he has in him a great and powerful spirit. Among the Dinka a man named Biyordit is supposed to be so influential because there is immanent in him a mighty spirit called Lerpiu.¹

Enough about the magician and his position in relation to other beings, to common men and cosmical agencies. Let us turn back for a moment to these agencies themselves. Some of them are bad and mischievous, others are good and beneficent. The Tshi people on the Gold Coast are not exceptions to the rule in believing that 'everything not made with hands has an indwelling spirit possessing powers beneficent or prejudicial to man, according to whether it is propitiated or neglected'.² This is only another way of saying that nature is now kind, at other times cruel, or that some beings and forces of nature work harm, others bestow favours and

¹ J. G. Frazer, *The Dying God*, p. 32.

² A. C. Haddan, *Magic and Fetishism*, p. 86.

blessings. Ill at ease savage man naturally is when the destroying agents are operating before his very eyes. He is no match for them himself, and the clever arts of his magician, though they may restore his confidence a little, are proved to be ultimately powerless. Has he any other city of refuge to flee to in his desperation? It is always open to him to turn to the vexatious powers directly, expostulate with them, and negotiate with them a treaty of peace. He is not so dull or stupid as not to think of this simple method of delivering himself from trouble or danger. In an old document of the Japanese called the 'Fourth Ritual' there is a story that the people were for some years troubled by severe storms. In their distress they had recourse to the spirit of the storm and proposed to it a bargain, the terms of which were that he should receive worship and offerings if he would desist from mischief and bless the harvest.¹ Indians, caught in a storm on the North American lakes, forthwith address themselves to the tempest-raising deity, offering him a sacrifice to appease him.² This is, doubtless, what every man would do if he had a spiritual enemy whom it was impossible by any other means to bring to reason. He would go to him personally and try to dissuade him from his harmful proceedings. But should he have a friend in the realm of spirits equal or superior in power to his enemy, he would naturally endeavour to entice him to do the work of curbing and subduing the enemy. Early man had indeed his friends among the agencies of nature, which were good and kind to him. The sun peeping

¹ Article in *Church Quarterly*, Oct. 1909.

² E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 341.

out in its charming way after a violent storm was manifesting its friendship for man. Could he then not appeal to these allies against the demons of darkness, storm, and disease? According to the myths or musings of ancient people, at any rate, the real conquerors of storm and darkness are sunshine and light, of death and disease life and health. Heracles, the humane and mighty hero, slays the giants, the malignant brood of night, with his arrows, that is the rays of the sun. The Tuatha De Danann in Irish folk-lore, the beneficent gods, arrive from heaven and engage in conflict with and beat the Fomorians, the gods of darkness.¹ The supreme being of the Hottentots named Tsuni-Grab, the red light of the dawn, stands in mythology in opposition to Gaunah, the dark sky.² Man knew who were his friends among the forces of nature, and knew how to draw their attention to himself in difficulties. They might at times pay no heed to his appeal, and he would in consequence turn in other directions for help and succour. But he never altogether lost faith in their power and will to aid him.

This brief survey has revealed to us a world where uncivilized man was not brutalized with fear. He moved about with considerable freedom and confidence, regarding it as his home and not a bad home at the worst. The panorama that presented itself to his gaze consisted of a large variety of living objects moving across the stage. Some of these were better equipped than himself in the matter of bodily advantages. They could run faster,

¹ Cf. J. A. MacCulloch, *Religion of Ancient Celts*, p. 53.

² D. G. Brinton, *Primitive Religions*, p. 75.

overcome him in a hand to hand encounter, beat him in a game of cunning. He got the better of these, however, in the long run by exercising that unique gift with which he is endowed, viz. his intellect, and managed to escape from the conflict and competition with the beasts a victor. With the elemental forces of nature, on the other hand, man could never feel so well at home as with the beasts, the birds, and the fishes. They were more or less a puzzle to him, for the reason that they were so arbitrary and incalculable in their movements. The storm comes he knows not whence and he cannot stop it. He may place food in a tree before his house and thus fodder the wind in the hope that it may do as little harm as possible.¹ But he has perforce to acknowledge his powerlessness and dependence, and ask the destructive demon to be good enough to withdraw, or he petitions the good and beneficent spirits of nature to assist him.

¹ Cf. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 244.

CHAPTER II

MAN AND THE SUPERNATURAL

RELIGION is a plant indigenous to the soil of human nature. By this is meant that no groups of human beings have been found without it. It exhibits, however, various degrees of growth, of health, and of strength. In one group it is shrunk and stunted, in another it is budding and blossoming and yielding wholesome fruit. But whether the plant is healthy or unhealthy in appearance, whether fruitful or barren and cumbering the ground, human nature is a soil from which it is never normally absent.

Should the question be pressed, who put the seed in the soil, or whence did the root of the plant come, we should have to be content with the admission that it is there and that no evidence is forthcoming of any previous period when it was absent. Religion does not seem to have sprung from a stray seed that by a happy accident alighted on human nature somewhat late in its development and began at once to germinate and grow. Nay, it is as intimately and integrally blended with man's constitution as the capacity for speech. On this matter a large number of distinguished writers are agreed, although the study of anthropology does not enable them to say the last word on the problem of the origin of religion. What is certain is that religion grew like everything else, and that in external nature some things were favourable to its

growth. It will be a useful task to survey the surroundings of early man and select from them the features which were likely to favour the growth of the seed of religion, or, in other words, to evoke and educate a sense of the supernatural.

Looking out on nature, man in early as in later days observed that everything went on, as a rule, just as he was expecting. Night followed day, season followed season, in constant and unvarying succession. The same sights were seen and the same sounds were heard year in and year out. This is the familiar and normal side of nature with which he does not seem to have troubled himself very much. So long as he got enough to eat and drink he was peaceful and contented. Perhaps a feeling of gratitude swelled up in his heart to the unknown Giver while he was enjoying the good things.

On the other hand, the intrusion of the unfamiliar, of weird spectacles and noises into his workaday world, stirs him deeply, awakens him from his self-complacency, and compels him to pause in wonder and alarm. The natural prospect which a moment ago was serene and quiet is now to his amazement frowning and tumultuous. His life and all that he holds dear are in danger. What thought is likely to arise in his mind in such circumstances unless he is too frightened to think at all? He is, of course, perplexed and bewildered, but not too much to feel that there is in the universe a force before which his own power pales into insignificance. And that force is to him no blind, unconscious law. He has no idea of what law is, for his life is not governed by law but by custom. He knows what force is, and if it is a force stronger than

his own, he knows that it is wielded by a living being stronger than himself. Since he is naturally disposed to the recognition of supernatural beings, any extraordinary feat of nature displayed before his eyes stimulates into activity his sense of their presence.

It is then the unusual and unfamiliar that first directs his thoughts to the supernatural, or rather he is more prompt to discern a supernatural being in what is unfamiliar and extraordinary than in the commonplace affairs of everyday life. The unfamiliar need not be something that is very striking and overwhelming. Enough that it should be what does not ordinarily happen. An African negro, says Dr. Tylor, was once going out on important business, but crossing the threshold he trod on a stone and hurt himself. 'Ha! Ha! thought he, art thou there?' and he took this stone for his fetish.¹ In Tara (Ireland) Conn the Hundred Fighter chanced to tread on a stone which screamed out as he was crossing the gorsedd. 'This stone was the so-called Lin Fail, or Stone of Fal, which became a fetish and an object of worship.'² If uncivilized man is so strangely affected by a stone over which he accidentally trips, what must be the stirrings within him when he is visited by a devastating flood or storm, or when he sees an eclipse or a comet! The emotion that swells in his bosom is nevertheless not that of absolute terror and dread. It partakes more of the nature of awe and wonder. The impression of which he is conscious is not unlike the feeling of the skye terrier experimented upon by Mr. Romanes. The terrier

¹ Vide F. B. Jevons, *Idea of God*, p. 15.

² J. Rhys, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 205.

was playing with a bone, tossing it about in the freest manner, but when a light thread attached to the bone was cautiously pulled, and gave the bone the appearance of self-movement, the dog immediately drew back in surprise and went and crouched down in a corner looking at the uncanny thing.¹ Man, however, differs from the dog in that he soon plucks up courage enough cautiously to approach the uncanny thing and beg it to be nice and pleasant to him.

Unusual manifestations, be it remembered, form a wide class and exhibit a large degree of variety. To this class belong comets, eclipses, destroying floods, violent thunder and tempest, strokes of good as well as of bad luck. They all come within the category of things to which man is not habituated. They are exhibitions which he has seldom or never seen before ; and although not one of them exactly resembles the other, they are all alike in this respect, that they have behind them an energy or driving power which he admires, but which nature has not bestowed upon himself. He cannot boast that he has such energy as part of his natural outfit. That is a property of superior beings and may be defined as *divine* force. At any rate it is not *human*, for it forms no part of the birthright of any man unless he is quite a unique individual. It may be called 'god' as is done by the people of Madagascar. Among them 'whatever is new and useful and extraordinary is termed god. Silk is considered as god in the highest degree.—Rice, money, thunder, lightning, and earthquake are called god.

¹ Cf. E. Clodd, *Animism*, p. 22.

Their ancestors, and a deceased sovereign they designate in the same manner'.¹ Their ancestors and a deceased sovereign since they have left the land of the living are no longer in the category of human beings. At the moment when they exchanged this life for the other there entered into them a current of power which enables them to put forth superhuman efforts. The Dinka of Central Africa, to whom we have before referred, felt more confident of accomplishing any arduous undertaking if they managed to draw to their side, or into their bodies, the *jok*, i.e. the spirits of their forefathers. But a king even in this life is no ordinary being. He has an endowment which is not granted but very exceptionally to others. In virtue of it he astonishes his subjects by the marvellous deeds he performs. On the same plane stands the magician. He also has extraordinary power which manifests itself in extraordinary works.

The energy thus displayed which often goes by the name of *mana*, a Melanesian word, is the peculiar property of supernatural beings, and very rarely, and then as if by accident, does it come into the possession of an ordinary man. And the proof that he has it must be shown through unusual performances. 'If a man has been successful in fighting, it has not been his natural strength of arm, quickness of eye, that has won him success, he has certainly got *mana* of a spirit, or of some deceased warrior to empower him. If a man's pigs multiply, and his gardens are productive, it is not because he is industrious, but because of the stones full

¹ A. B. Ellis, *History of Madagascar*, i. 391-2, quoted by R. R. Marett, *Threshold of Religion*, p. 11.

of *mana* for pigs and yams that he possesses.'¹ The man of power, therefore, is he who has secured a reinforcement of his own natural gifts by drawing to himself the divine energy or *mana* that appertains to the supernatural. *Mana* was a useful possession with the aid of which man felt he could do almost anything. The difficulty was to come across it and get hold of it. In the world this energy or *mana* was floating about and alighting here and there, upon a stone perhaps, and lucky was he who owned that stone. If man, then, as soon as the vision of the supernatural opened out to him, were to describe what he meant by a supernatural being, he would say that it was a being having *mana* in his nature which was seen at work in the striking and unique and wonderful features of the outer world. Beyond this conception of bare power he did not advance, remaining blind to the fact that that being was just and good and loving to man.

An analogy has been frequently drawn between the rude man of uncivilized regions and the child of civilized parents, and it has been maintained that the feelings and thoughts of both are more or less identical. No doubt there are points of resemblance between them, but one may be tempted to press the analogy too far. In physical strength, of course, the child is no match for the savage, and one would be rash to assert that the intellect and heart of the former give us an exact representation of those of the latter. The child has behind him a long line of civilized ancestors, who certainly have bequeathed something to his nature which was not present in primi-

¹ R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians*, p. 118.

tive man. It is hard to define what that is. An illustration perhaps might do. There are two plots of ground which are to be utilized for growing fruit and vegetables. They are both carefully cultivated and dressed. The one turns out the finest products, whereas the other seems loth to yield any results at all. What accounts for this dissimilarity? The soil of the one is good and of the other bad. From the mind of the child after it has been properly trained and educated you can hope for worthy results, but not from the mental apparatus of the savage. The soil of his nature is wellnigh barren. The memory of the child is a better instrument for its purpose, his imagination is more vivid and productive than that of the child-man of the undeveloped races.¹ But still they are both liable to receive similar impressions from the world without. When the child is angry with his doll and strikes it, his state of mind and feeling is that of the savage, who beats and throws away his fetish that has brought him nothing but ill-luck. How truly also is the child-feeling obtaining the upper hand in the savage when he cuts up a tree into splinters because a bough of it has caused the death of his fellow!² In the presence of unexpected and strange manifestations again they are thrilled and moved very much alike. When witnessing an impressive theatrical exhibition the child is fascinated, he is also surprised and alarmed. He cannot account for it; it is so different from anything he has previously seen.

¹ Cf. art. Andamans, *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*: 'In childhood the Andamanese are possessed of a bright intelligence, which,

He is for the moment too much affected to think about the cause of it, yet there has entered his mind, in spite of his agitation, or by reason of his agitation, a vague confused idea of some power greater than that of man behind the scenes.¹ He sees man working every day and there is little in that to occasion him any astonishment or fear. But the exhibition which he has just witnessed is no ordinary process. Of that he is sure, for why should he feel so bewildered and uncomfortable? And there must be a force operating to produce it which man, as he understands him, is incapable of exerting.

The analogy between the child and the savage does not stop there. We may further point to the restless curiosity which leads them both to ascertain something definite about the wonder-working agent, to locate him and so gain a view of him, and if possible to placate him. The curiosity of primitive man could not be so easily set at rest, for he had no wise and experienced elders to explain to him the why and wherefore. He had to make many experiments and find out things for himself. This he did with all the ingenuity and vigour of youth. Early man having satisfied himself that there was a being of superhuman energy in the world, was constrained by the very deepest instincts of his nature to go in search of him. He sought for him here and there just as the thirsty man in a desert place wanders in many directions for water.

Now the variety of living and inanimate objects in which man has from time to time detected the super-

¹ Cf. G. B. Foster, *The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle*

natural is positively bewildering. To detail them here would be tedious work and would not be quite germane to our purpose. The best thing to do, perhaps, is to select an object of worship which is more or less common to all races in their initial stages, and which better than any other object affords us a glimpse into the mind and practice of the worshipping heathen. That object is found in a particular animal, or rather a *species* of animals, which receives the utmost reverence and even worship from backward peoples.

It might be as well to intimate before proceeding any further that totemism, or respect for certain classes of animals or plants, or sometimes of inanimate things, is denied by some writers to have had anything to do with religion. Prof. Frazer in his exhaustive work on *Totemism and Exogamy* regards its influence as subordinate to that of the worship of the dead, and the worship of nature, in the evolution of religion. But totemism even among the Central Australians which has afforded wide scope to the theorizing faculty of Dr. Frazer has a flavour of religion. The blacks of this region, indeed, have very infantile conceptions, and particularly so of the world of nature. Everything, it is said, is set going and ordered among them by magic. Magic controls and regulates the elements as well as the beasts of the field. The attention paid to animals proceeds from magical and not from religious motives, the aim being to secure their multiplication. The question arises, are we to judge of what totemism really was at its start from what goes on to-day among the Australian blacks? Some competent

are a degenerate people, having once been on a higher cultural level than they are now. If that is true, their totem ceremonies may formerly have had a different meaning. But it will not be doubted that 'the totem is sacred; in this capacity it is looked upon as a source of strength and holiness. To live beside it and under its protection is a salutary thing'.¹ When the Australian goes to war he leaves his soul behind him, lest it should come to grief. Where does he leave it? Not under the care of a friend or relative, but with the *nurtunfa*, the magic pole, on which are pictured devices of the totem.² There is a superior element in the totem which is hardly distinguishable from divinity, and this is conspicuous in the case of the snake totem of the Warramunga (Central Australia), which, according to Dr. Frazer, was 'a dominant totem'.

A brief summary is here necessary of some few characteristics which are more or less true of totemism everywhere. (a) The totem is not merely an ally of the clan-people; it is, in fact, a near kinsman, for its far-off ancestor and theirs was the same. It is, therefore, related to them by blood, and the relationship between them is conceived by some totemites to be so close as to amount almost to identity. The Kangaroo man of Central Australia says that the kangaroo is the same thing as himself. This is probably only a way of describing the intimacy of the tie that binds him to the animal, just as the people of ancient Israel, when a son, a daughter, or other relative was killed, used to exclaim: 'Our blood

¹ Salomon Reinach, *Orpheus*, p. 17.

² J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 127.

has been shed.¹ The union is certainly close, but it does not involve equality of gifts and powers as between the tribesman and his totem. The totem cures the sick, heals wounds, and gives oracles. In Tahiti sickness is ascribed to the displeasure of the totem, and the sick man must make amends for his offence, such as returning stolen property, before he is restored to health.²

(b) When a more genuine fusion of the clansmen with one another and the totem is desired, they eat portions of the sacred animal. 'In Hawaii the whole of the sacred offering (a pig) had to be eaten; - any man who refused to eat would be put to death, and if the whole offering were not consumed, a terrible visitation would descend upon all the inhabitants.'³ The animal, being sacrosanct, was too precious and awful for any particle of it to be lost or wasted; and the entire community partook of the flesh, for thus only were they all sure of being knit together by the mysterious virtue of the totem. Any member who neglected this duty sundered himself from the clan body and became an outcast. It should be observed that the people by consuming the flesh and blood of the animal were aiming chiefly at absorbing not its natural, but its supernatural contents, for it was just these that were indispensable to maintain the vigour and solidarity of the clan. Hence if the clansmen, as they do in Australia, boast of their abilities to perform wonders, such as the curing of serpent bites, they do it in virtue of

¹ Cf. W. Robertson Smith, *Early Religion of the Semites*, p. 274.

² F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 111.

³ Ibid., p. 147. Cf. also J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 120.

the potent ingredients transfused into them from the totem.¹

(c) The sacred life is not confined to the individual animal that is being killed; it is present in all the remaining members of the species. So that in totemism the divine life is

‘ Lying confusedly, insubordinate ’,
not yet

‘ Diminished into clearness,
Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear ’.²

The outline of it is dim and vague. How otherwise could it have been with a life which is distributed through a whole class or species of animated forms? Indeed it is not a very easy matter for ourselves to construct a notion of the personality of the God who is immanent in the whole of His creation, and whom we Christians worship. How much less easy for the rude savage, who has but the faintest idea of himself as an independent person, to summon up in his mind a concrete image, clear-cut and rounded off, of the supernatural life that pervades the totem species! His notion of it may be compared with our conception of the *purpose* that impels a number of men who are intent on carrying out a certain project. We call it a living active purpose; we personify it for the sake of giving it a lucid and emphatic utterance; but we are far from ascribing to it an existence of its own apart from the minds and hearts of those whom it inspires. The defection of one or two men does not in any appreciable degree affect the purpose. If one dies or falls away

¹ Vide J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 133.

² R. Browning, *A Death in the Desert*.

there are others to keep the purpose strong and vigorous. Analogies are always apt to explain too little or too much, yet the analogy that has been employed will serve to show at least the impersonal character of the totem god.

The question that will concern us during the remainder of this chapter has reference to the process whereby the haziness that encompassed the supernatural was being gradually stripped off until at last he stood forth with an articulateness and distinctness of personality which left little to be desired. The first step in this direction seems to have been taken when man thought it possible by a contrivance of his own to transfer the sacred life from its usual abode to some object, a piece of stone or wood. The stone played a part of great importance in early religion, and its use in this capacity furthered man's best interests more really than its employment as a tool or weapon for slaying his enemies. Particular stones become the temporary or permanent dwelling-places of the supernatural. Why he should fix upon a stone as the embodiment of the divine will be clear at once if it be observed that the blood of the sacred animal was shed upon a stone. The blood was too holy a substance to be allowed to fall on the ground. And no more useful and worthy receptacle suggested itself than a stone, which also served to support the victim as it was being slain. The life divine was in the blood, which, when poured, communicated its sacred essence to the stone. There are, of course, other reasons why stones are held in veneration, such as the fact that they are unusual in appearance, or are connected with graves. But whatever the origin of the idea of their sacred character, they helped man to

conceive of the supernatural as a person. The stone is a concrete, tangible object lying there on the ground before man's eyes. He sees its size and shape and so forth; and what can be more natural than to suppose that the supernatural being indwelling it, cribbed and cabined there, is as accessible and as observant of what is going on around as the living soul that moves and dwells in the human body. In the stone the supernatural being was reduced to intelligible measures and proportions, to such a size as man could comprehend and understand. And man instinctively falls down on his knees before the stone, and prays to it for help, knowing that the god is there listening, and interested in the petition that is addressed to him. 'Among the American Indians the place of national worship for the Oneidas was the famous Oneida stone from which they claim descent.'¹ Mr. Turner in his *History of Samoa* mentions that on Francis Island 'close by the Temple there was a seven feet long beach sandstone slab erected, before which offerings were laid as the people united for prayer'.

In course of time the stone by degrees underwent a change in appearance and form. Originally a rough block it was from time to time chipped and trimmed until it attained the dignity of an effigy of man. The transformation that took place in the appearance of the stone corresponded with the growth of a clearer perception of what the god was in the mind of man, who, in ascribing feelings, mind, and will to the god, could not better express what he meant than by enclosing him in

¹ F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 139.

a stone or wooden image, in the likeness and similitude of a man.

The idol of stone and wood has been fiercely castigated by the devotees of the higher religions. But if they had been made aware of the real and wholesome service rendered by the idol, of the assistance it lent benighted peoples to gain a clearer understanding, and a more genuine appreciation of the personal properties of the being whom they worshipped, their onslaughts on idolatry would have been less severe, and they would have been rather disposed to be sympathetic. If the idol had the effect of limiting and debasing the transcendent qualities of the deity, his spirituality, his ineffable might, it had its compensating uses in that it brought him nearer to the worshipper and made him a more intelligible being.

The *name* was not a less valuable factor than the idol in clarifying the idea of the supernatural. It drew him forth from the darkness behind the visible scenes of life, and held him up, placarded before men's eyes, so that he became better known and a more intimate comrade of his worshippers. So long as he was without a personal name he, of course, remained a somewhat obscure being, as much of a problem to early people as the storm that swept past them and which they could not hold back and interrogate. What's in a name? The people who have not enjoyed the fruits of our modern civilization would say there was a great deal in it. We with our practical aptitudes look upon a name as a mere tag or label attached to a person (or thing), to distinguish him from somebody else. A child may be named after some

necessarily specifies any peculiarities of the child. The name might with equal appropriateness be applied to a domestic animal. Be that as it may, words and names even among ourselves as a rule have certain definite meanings assigned to them, and they are indispensable for the purpose of conveying our ideas about various matters to others and defining them to ourselves, for it is seldom we have a firm grasp of our own ideas until we have clothed them in language. Uncivilized man appraises a word, or at any rate a personal name, at a higher worth than we do. The name of a man or woman or god has magic virtue in it, something to conjure with. There is bound up with the name the very essence or soul of the person who bears it. No doubt many ages elapsed before a personal name came to be loaded with such a significant content. The earliest men of this globe would not, we may suppose, value a name so highly. But the names current among them, if they had any, would not be meaningless sounds. They expressed, imperfectly, of course, the ideas entertained of the persons or things to which they were given. The name of the supernatural may be taken as a definition of his nature expressing what early man saw in him. Besides, the very act of naming the deity made him a familiar friend of his worshippers, and drew him within the circle of their acquaintances. Originally the supernatural was the energy which was operative in the abnormal occurrences which excited in man wonder and alarm. And man calls that energy by a name which connotes something unusually potent in its working. The name may be

less words, and are not personal names. They simply bring before men's minds the ineffable force of the supernatural. While this state of things continued the savage might well say with Paracelsus :

‘I gazed on power till I grew blind.

On power; I could not take my eyes from that.’¹

The power of the deity, irrespective of any goodness or badness that may belong to him, solely occupies the field of vision. ‘To whom are you praying?’ asked Hale of a Sakai chief at one of those fruit festivals so characteristic of the Malay Peninsula. ‘To the *Hantus* (spirits),’ he replied, ‘the *Hantus* of the forest, of the mountains, of the rivers, the *Hantus* of the Sakai chiefs who are dead.’² The beings appealed to here in prayer are designated *spirits*, for the reason that the exercise of extraordinary energy is their characteristic. Nothing further is said about them; their *differentia* is not given. Their genus only is mentioned, and that genus is ‘spirit’.

A significant step in advance was taken when the spirits received a name descriptive of their individual qualities and functions. The Dii Indigites of Italy are a case in point. They are gods whose names designate certain functions. One of them is Deus Vagitanus, and his duty is to do what his name implies, to open the lips of the infant, and thus enable it to utter its first cry. Corn goddesses are of the same class. Their life and energy are exerted in causing the corn to grow and ripen, and the name which they bear signifies no more than that they watch over the growth of cereals and

¹ R. Browning, *Paracelsus*.

² R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, p. 8.

bring them to maturity. As an instance of this, one may refer to the Mexican goddess, Chicomecoatl, and the Roman Ceres. As for the Greek Demeter, she was a corn goddess originally, but has passed out of that primitive stage and has undertaken wider functions. She has come to be a dispenser of ordinances, a Thesmo-phoros.¹ If her name had nothing to do with the process whereby her duties were altered and widened, it at least preserved her identity. She was Demeter before and after. When the god (or the goddess) is by force of circumstances dissociated from his peculiar functions, there is always the risk of his being forgotten altogether. If, however, he survives the act of severance it is the name that brings him through safe and sound. The name of a god has become so familiar that, in spite of the changes he undergoes, and the disintegrating influences that may play upon him, it succeeds not only in keeping alive his memory, but in placarding him forth as still a living and real being. Bel of Nippur furnishes us with an example. In his earliest days at Nippur he was a powerful demon, and no doubt the wind and the storm were the elements through which he principally manifested himself. Nippur, like all other cities, in time lost its importance, and Bel would of course suffer the same fate had not his name secured for him a place among the chief Babylonian gods. 'The assigning of the local deity of Nippur to a position in the Triad served to maintain his cult long after Nippur had lost its political supremacy.'² A new lease of life was enjoyed by Amon

¹ Hastings's *Dict. of the Bible*, extra vol., p. 135.

² *Ibid.*, p. 539.

of Thebes when his name was joined to that of Ra. Amon was at first a god of the reproductive forces of nature, but at a later period as Amon-Ra he is a creator, dispenser of nourishment, &c.¹

Daramulun in South Eastern Australia is the name of the voice or noise produced by the whirling of the bull-roarer—a slab of wood tied to the end of a string,—and it is also the name of a sky-dweller, the institutor of society.² The name is so sacred that it must not be uttered incautiously. That being so, one is disposed to think that it is the name that principally invests 'the sky-dweller' with his peculiar reverence and dignity. There is something awful about the name 'Daramulun', and there must therefore be something awful about the being who owns it.

In a word, a personal name is so potent that it can make the dead live, an impersonal force to be a personal being with the capacity to will, think, and feel. Take the case of the sacred stone of the Ephesians. How long would that dead boulder have attracted the religious feelings and worship of men and women, if it had had no name to remind them of its powers and the interest it took in them? It had a name, and a well-known one, Artemis, which worked the miracle of turning the stone into a personal agent of more than human measures.³

'Then were they known to men by various names,
And various idols through the heathen world.'⁴

¹ Hastings's *Dict. of the Bible*, extra vol., p. 185.

² A. Lang, *Magic and Religion*, p. 66.

³ Hastings's *Dict. of the Bible*, extra vol., p. 112.

⁴ Milton's *Paradise Lost*, i. 374 f.

The god has become a personal being, conducting himself in ways that please him best. He is living and active, taking thought for men, watching over them and imparting to them blessings in proportion to the extent to which their doings are agreeable to him. If they live up to the standard he has fixed, they are rewarded with his favours; if not, they must look for punishment. He issues his commands, and if they are obeyed, his help can be counted on by the worshipper. Above all, he does not wish for anything which will not be for the best welfare of the community. An example of his usual method of proceeding is provided in a symbolic form in the effigy of Osiris. Osiris holds in his hands a shepherd's crook and a scourge, which signify that he leads his people like a shepherd, and punishes them when guilty of wrongdoing.

Life in primitive communities would be impossible were there not some amount of order and discipline maintained. Some things had to be done and other things had not to be done. Duties and prohibitions were enforced, the prohibitions no doubt preponderating. The prohibition was a *taboo*, a thing to be strictly avoided, for a breach of it brought immediate punishment. The tabooed thing was as it were infected, and any one who came into contact with it when he had no right to do so was seized with the infection, which like poison racked his body with pain. For example, a piece of stolen property communicates its fell virus to him who steals it. A morsel of food which is taboo does the same thing. Now after the god has established a stable position for himself in the community, and is looked up to as ruler and guardian, the old prohibitions, the taboos, which

hitherto had automatically punished the breaker of them, come to be viewed as his commands, and it is he who henceforth inflicts punishment on the delinquent. The god thus upholds and vindicates all that is best among the people. He loves and helps the upright liver, and hates the evil-doer.

A brief examination has been made of some facts in nature outside him which fashioned, deepened, and purified primitive man's idea of his god. But having done this the writer is very conscious of having ignored another class of facts which have been as important as any in determining the manner in which the religious belief arose and grew to maturity. The process was determined by man's inner consciousness, his needs and aspirations. How far these moved man to ascribe the highest motives and character to the god will be never known, for the simple reason that he has not written down for us his deepest desires and instincts. All that we can with certainty gather is that, far back through the dark vista of time, individual men have now and again arisen who were gifted beyond their contemporaries, had further insight into life with all that it means, had a firmer grip of truth, and were thus enabled by their influence unconsciously exercised to uplift their generation. They are the great thinkers, the original men, the seers, 'whose shaped, spoken Thought awakes the slumbering capability of all into Thought.'¹ They are the men who can sift the false from the true, distinguish between illusions and realities, and explode the pretensions of the magician who boasts of his power to command rain and sunshine.

¹ T. Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 21.

This at least all must admit. Inspired men, men of superior wisdom and insight, have appeared in most ages, even among the simple clans that have not as yet emerged from the era of childhood. And their work in the world has to be taken into account by any one who is engaged in tracing the progress of religion.

CHAPTER III

MAN AND HIS KIND

THERE is one significant fact which has already claimed some attention, but which now needs further emphasis. It is that man in primitive society is not an individual enjoying freedom and independence, acting in ways which are most agreeable and fitting to himself. He is not a kind of wild beast moved by his own instinct, or as the fancy takes him. He is rather like a machine set going and controlled by the application of pressure from without. Personal freedom he has not, for he is hemmed in on all sides by custom and tradition, and it is his business to conform his life and conduct to these rather than consult his own interests. These customs and rules were there before he was born, and he exists for them and not they for him. No choice is offered him between obedience and disobedience. He is commanded to obey. If, however, he conducts himself otherwise than as the clan rules prescribe, he must look to be treated as an enemy and expelled, or put to death. His position in the clan is similar to that of a man in our modern crowd. Wherever the crowd moves, he moves, and whatever the crowd thinks, he thinks. He is for the time being absolutely under the domination of others; his own petty will is overruled and overborne by that of

the crowd. He feels quite passive and abject under the influence of the collective mind of such large numbers.

The average savage was quite satisfied with an arrangement of this kind, and would not think of rebelling against the system, inasmuch as he had not yet learnt to think for himself, or to know the value of individual freedom. He had, of course, desires often surging up within him which the clan traditions stamped as lawless, yet in his simplicity and ignorance he would not be so bold as to question the rightness or wrongness of the traditions. It was enough that the tradition ordered a course of action, and he was not the man to ask the reason why. Far from it: his desires, when they conflicted with the customs, were rebel forces which must be kept down. That is what the wisdom enshrined in the traditions of the community says. And no one presumes to criticize that wisdom. 'To doubt the traditions of the tribe that have been handed down through the generations and taught them by their parents does not occur to them' (i.e. savages).¹ Thus if it is the tribal rule that men should abstain from a particular kind of food, or that they should not form marital connexions with certain classes of women, he would be a *rara avis* who disregarded it.

A system such as this, while it left to the individual hardly any opportunity for the exercise of initiative, or for taking a line of his own when he thought it to be more beneficial to the community than the usual routine, tended to produce upon his mind a permanent impression that he was living and labouring not for himself alone,

¹ J. B. Pratt, *Psychology of Religious Belief*, p. 48.

but for others as well. What a splendid school it was for educating men in the lessons of kindness and unselfishness!

If one was made to feel that he had no future of his own to look forward to except in so far as he shared it with his brother clansmen, that his own private interests were intimately bound up with those of the clan, he would serve the clan with a hearty goodwill, and would be little tempted to steal a private advantage at the expense of the whole. 'If one member suffer, the others suffer with it' is a principle which is as true of early clans as it is of the Christian Society, and it is the principle which beyond anything else inclined uncivilized man to be kind and well-disposed to his fellows. His fellows belonged to him, were a part and parcel of him, and in treating them well he was benefiting himself.

On taking a broad view of savage races, perhaps the most striking and admirable feature amid much that is revolting and depressing is their generosity and kindness of heart. They are ready to give of their penury and scarcity to a brother in want. He is not allowed to suffer if there is but a morsel of food in the possession of his kinsmen. 'The hungry Indian had but to ask to receive, and this no matter how small the supply, or how dark the future prospect. It was not only his privilege to ask, it was his right to receive.—Hospitality was a law.'¹ This is no mere isolated example. It reflects what appears to be a very prevalent state of things.

All parts of the world inhabited by uncivilized people afford similar instances of a generous and hospitable

¹ *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii, p. 376, art. Charity.

spirit. Locked together as they are in small groups in mutual interdependence, the tie of fellowship that binds together the individual members of a group is exceptionally close and strong. Cases are known where men have deliberately put themselves to death in order that they might go and serve their leaders in the other world.¹ Mothers and nurses become so attached to their infant that if it dies they kill themselves so as to go after it and tend it elsewhere. Wonderful consideration is also shown for the aged. This is rather a remarkable fact, for the aged are no longer of any use to the community. They are a burden to themselves and a burden to others. If the community consulted its own convenience, it would remove them off-hand out of the way. The growth of affection for the old has resulted from the system under which the people live. Between members who are thrown together and depend entirely on one another a strong tie of kindness is created, which no mere demand of convenience is strong enough to break. Indeed the old people sometimes think that the care for them is carried too far, now that they have become cumbersome, and of their own accord often put an end to themselves. Says one old man: 'I live other people's lives; it is time to retire.'²

Here, then, among groups of men deep in ignorance and superstition there is provided the nursing ground for those 'habits of loyalty, love, and self-sacrifice', forming, according to Robertson Smith, the basis of 'the

¹ Cf. G. Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*, chap. xii.

² Prince Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution*, p. 103.

larger morality which embraces all mankind'.¹ There is another side to the picture. The savage, notwithstanding the presence of amiable traits, is an intractable being, who does not readily fall into a position of subordination and obedience in the community. He, like all men, has impulses and passions both selfish and cruel, which only severe measures can repress. Unless they are checked and kept down it is impossible for him to cohere in the body of the clan. The savage, however, is not left to himself in the arduous work of disciplining and shaping himself for union with his brother clansmen. On the contrary, everything is done for him by them, and he has no option but to submit to whatever extreme chastening measures they may employ. On reaching the age of puberty the boy (and often the girl) is made to run the gauntlet of severe discipline. He is scourged, mutilated, deprived of food, and is made to suffer other species of cruel handling, which sometimes prove fatal to him. In Central Africa the Bantus force the boy to lie down on his back on a log, and to fasten his eyes on the glaring sun until he is blind and unconscious. 'Among the modern tribes of Central Australia the long and complicated ceremonies of initiation to manhood include beating, circumcision, subincision, and biting the youth's scalp, while, as a rule, though fasting is not carried to an extreme, several foods are tabu.'² How such a mad and brutal procedure could be thought to qualify the lad for his duties in the clan is a problem to us. We should be rather disposed to think that no more

¹ W. Robertson Smith, *Early Religion of the Semites*, p. 54.

² *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, art. Austerities.

effectual method could have been devised for incapacitating him. But we must look at the matter from the point of view of savages. The growing boy is becoming more and more unruly as the life-forces within him become more active. He has reached a critical age; he is menaced by dangers within and without. Outside him there are numerous spirits of evil lurking about and ready to do him mischief if they have but the chance, the raw and tender material of the boy's body being particularly liable to attacks from that quarter. Unless this point be kept in mind, it will be impossible to understand the significance of the severe handling to which the boy is subjected. If the body is ruthlessly beaten and maltreated, any evil spirit that has got into it and found a lodgement there will find the place becoming too hot for it, and will make haste to depart. There can be no other explanation of the practice among the Bechuanas of scourging the youths after circumcision with great severity.¹ The same motive lay behind the practice of beating the king with a branch when he was installed in the Sandwich Islands. The king when he enters upon his regal duties, equally with the young lad, affords a conspicuous target for the assaults of the malicious demons. But still the evil spirit was not the only source of trouble. The youth has vicious tendencies which, if they are allowed to spring up, will turn him into an uncontrollable beast. Savages, however dull, cannot help being aware of the fact. Accordingly they take care to arrest and stop tendencies of the kind in the bud. No more than ourselves are they tolerant of the

¹ *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, art. Austerities, p. 229.

unbridled licence of youth. The Kurnai of South Central Australia are still in all probability but little removed from the starting-point of progress; yet they are not blind and indifferent to the mischievous instincts and doings of lads, neither do they mistake these instincts for evil spirits. At the initiation ceremonies 'the stomachs of the boys were kneaded to drive out selfishness and greed'. Mr. A. W. Howitt, who supplies this information, relates further the initiation proceedings of the Coast Murring of South-East Australia, during which the boys were impressed with the necessity of being truthful and honest.¹ They are threatened with violence and death if they should disregard what was told them.

The lesson of self-restraint is not easily learned, and it may be that the brutalities practised on the youth in savage ceremonies are only a measure of the difficulty of taming his wild and lawless spirit. Being but a few steps in advance of the beast in manners, strong coercive measures were indispensable before he could be brought to live orderly and peaceably in society. But be it remembered that the lesson learned in youth, although conveyed to him in a manner never to be forgotten, was not stern enough to ensure his obedience to rule throughout his life. He will ride rough-shod over the most sacred traditions and rules in spite of the whipping he has received unless there are other means to prevent him. What are those means? They are the penalties attached to all and sundry offences against tribal duties. There is nothing that avails so effectually to curb the insolent and selfish passion of man, and especially of the

¹ *Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, p. 100.

savage, as a fear of punishment. Let us examine some of the duties required of him, and this will appear very clearly.

(a) His duty to the old and infirm. To them he was expected to show respect and kindness, for they were usually the depositories of wisdom. Having taken their share during their lives in promoting the welfare of the clan, they deserve to be held in honour and esteem. The young would be reluctant to carry out this duty in all circumstances. When food was hard to get, and when the enemy was pressing hard on him and his fellows, the aged and the sick were a hindrance rather than a help to him. Will he not in his difficulty change his feelings towards them? He was at least tempted to remove them out of the way, and thus lessen the number of hungry mouths, and rid himself of useless encumbrances. And he did not always resist the temptation, but killed the old people and ate them. The aged, however, were not always at the mercy of those who were younger and stronger. They were not entirely defenceless. There had been drawn around them a shield which the arrows of the mighty could not easily pierce. They had blood in their veins which was as sacred as that of any other member of the clan, and the shedding of their blood was a heinous crime to be expiated by the death of the murderer. In saying this the fact must not be forgotten that they were sometimes put to death so that the blood and life in them might not decay, but might be devoured by others and thus preserved fresh and vigorous. But this kind of thing is not very prevalent. Moreover, the weakly and the aged had souls, which would return and

avenge them if any violence were done them. Superstition of this sort has protected them more securely than any two-edged sword.

A man suffering from sleeping sickness on the Upper Congo was very troublesome to his neighbours. Common prudence dictated his removal to some solitary island in mid-river, but that was not done because it was thought that his ghost might come back to annoy them after his death.¹ In this connexion it would be well to call to mind the words of Dr. Frazer—‘While the spirit of a murdered man is feared by everybody, it is natural that it should be specially dreaded by those against whom for any reason he may be conceived to bear a grudge.’² There was thus a double motive against committing murder. To put to death a clansman was a civil offence, a crime against the community. And should the murderer escape he would risk being haunted by the dead man’s ghost, a contingency which proved more horrible than death.

(b) His duty to chiefs. ‘Above all men is the chief: absolute obedience is due to him; his person and possessions are to be respected.’³ This is one of the directions given to the youth at his initiation among the Western Bushongo, a Bantu people of the Congo. Something like it is enforced on the novice all over the world. The authority of the prince or head-man is more or less supreme, and he is accordingly treated with more respect and reverence than any of his subjects. He exercises

¹ *Report of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference*, vol. iv, p. 11.

his authority in virtue of his transcendent powers, which he has inherited from his ancestors ; or, in places such as the Andaman Islands where descent does not count in the appointment of a chief, he has been eminently successful in war, or is noted for his kindness, and he rules in the strength of the certificate which his capabilities have won for him. It is to the interest of the subjects to protect and preserve their chief, for they cannot get on well without some one to lead them in war and in the affairs of everyday life. More than that, the life of the chief is in a sort of sympathetic relationship to that of the community. If any harm come to him the community itself will automatically suffer, while his violent death will mean a serious calamity, perhaps the entire breaking up of the community. We shall not detail the measures adopted by the people to preserve their chief inviolate, but we shall supply two or three examples which explain their mutual relationship. Actions of an illicit and offensive character are avoided by the people owing to the evil effect they may have upon him. 'In Humbe, a kingdom of Angola, the incontinence of young people under the age of puberty used to be a capital crime, because it was believed to entail the death of the king within the year.'¹ The married people of the West African kingdom of the Congo had to observe continence the whole time the chief was out ; any breach of this rule would prove fatal to him.² But one may venture to assert that the people persisted in their loyalty, and in their regard for the chief as much from

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

fear of what they would suffer themselves as from dread of some calamity that might overtake him if they proved themselves disloyal. They abstained from acts detrimental or repugnant to him because he held in his hands an iron rod, which he would lay without mercy on the culprit. Nor was he merely dependent on the strength and length of his own arm for meting out punishment. He could summon ghostly powers to work their displeasure on offenders. Melanesian chiefs 'hold communication with mighty ghosts, and possess that supernatural power, or *mana*, as it is called, whereby they are able to turn the influence of the ghosts to account. If a chief imposed a fine, it was paid because the people firmly believed that he could inflict calamity and sickness'.¹ In short, the person of the chief or king is, as a rule, sacred or *taboo*, and this serves to maintain his authority, and preserve him from assault. There is stored up in him a mysterious force or energy which may cause injury or even death to any one who touches him. It operates like an electric current, passing from the person of the chief to his clothing and food. Woe betide him who comes into contact with anything belonging to the chief. No one among the Cazembes in the interior of Angola could touch the king without risk of death from 'the magical power that emanated from his sacred person'.²

(c) His duty to women. It is not easy to define the position of woman in primitive society. Descent was frequently, if not in the majority of cases, counted on the mother's side. The children belonged to her and to her

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

people and not to the father. It would seem a natural inference that she wielded a great deal of influence and authority. Without doubt she did in many places, but inferences are apt to be misleading when one is treating of a matter so obscure as this. One incontestable fact there is, that the women were almost invariably classed with the children, and were in a state of subjection to the men. The important secrets of the clan were not revealed to them any more than to the children; and any man who divulged any of this knowledge to them was liable to be put to death. Did man, then, treat woman as his momentary fancy dictated, and compel her to be always at his service? Because she lacked his physical strength, and was his inferior in intellect, he was incited at times to make unworthy use of his advantage over her. But after all, woman is an uncanny and mysterious being, and the uncouth savage seeing this was involuntarily drawn to respect her, and view her as something better than a mere drudge.

The saying attributed to the Indian god, Indra, expresses pretty truly the feeling of backward races. 'Woman's wit is hard to know aright, and her intelligence is small.' If her intelligence is small, she has her compensations. Her very constitution is a problem to man; he cannot understand it aright, and this fact tends to raise her in his regard. We are never contemptuous of what is too deep and mysterious to probe. Our contempt is generally reserved for what is too familiar to interest us. If primitive man was inclined to despise woman's frailty, he at any rate feared and honoured the unknown in her. The girl for the first few years of her

life is brought up just like the boys. She moves freely among them. But when she comes to mature years and gets married, she enters, so to speak, on her career of mystery. She is afterwards in a sense a dangerous being, and is surrounded by a number of *taboos*. 'In Mayumbe it is death to touch another man's wife.'¹

Whereas before marriage she was *noa* (common) and was available as a wife to any man who came from some other clan than her own, after marriage she is placed by the *taboo* under severe restrictions. But supposing she proved faithless to her husband, what would be the consequences? Both she and the guilty man receive condign punishment if the act of guilt is detected. Indeed even when it is not discovered there are spiritual agencies, who will not allow the crime to pass with impunity; and what is more, they not only make the adulterers suffer, but the whole clan. They blast the crops on which the people depend for food, and send lightning and earthquake to destroy. Among the people of Assam 'so long as the crops remain ungarnered, it is believed that the slightest incontinence will ruin all'.² The districts actually traversed by an adulterer are accursed by the gods until the proper sacrifice has been offered.³ The community find it their best policy, therefore, rigidly to prevent incontinence. If they fail, then they must seek out any such act, and, when discovered, wipe out the stain in the most ruthless fashion.

(d) His duty to strangers. Early man like the child of to-day is always shy of strangers, and more ready to

avoid them than try to be friendly with them. There are two reasons for this. In a district where the supply of food is restricted, the stranger who appears there is my rival and competitor, and as I cannot think of bargaining or entering into a compact with him for the even distribution of what is fit for food, I must vanquish and drive him off, or allow myself to be worsted by him. It may be that the stranger belongs to a clan that is at peace with my own, because it belongs to the same tribe. In that case we must pull together, I procuring food for him, and he for me, as is done in Australia. The Emu clan multiply emu birds for the use of other clans, and these in turn perform a similar office for the Emu clan. It should be pointed out that the chief cause of mischief between clan and clan, and what tends to alienate the one from the other, is the blood-feud. A member of my clan is killed by a fellow from another clan. It becomes the duty of my clan therefore to wreak vengeance on the murderer, or if he cannot be found, then the death of any of his fellows will do. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, his own blood or the blood of a kinsman must be shed in return.

Generally speaking, however, the total stranger is an enemy. The two words may be taken as synonymous among rude people. The stranger is a man about whom I know next to nothing, and in this one particular he is on the same footing as woman. He partakes of the nature of the uncanny and the mysterious. As he is quite unknown to me there possibly lurks in his body some evil influence, which might do me more harm than any visible tangible weapon he could wield. I must, therefore, opines primi-

tive man, keep away from him, or else acquire the help of some mysterious force which may act as a counter-blast to his. In any case it is necessary that I should be wary in the presence of strangers. 'Before strangers are allowed to enter a district, or at least before they are allowed to mingle freely with the inhabitants, certain ceremonies are often performed by the natives of the country for the purpose of disarming the strangers of their magical powers, of counteracting the baneful influence which is believed to emanate from them.'¹ Among many other examples, Dr. Frazer gives that of the ambassadors of Justin II, Emperor of the East, going to conclude a peace with the Turks. 'They were received by shamans, who subjected them to a ceremonial purification for the purpose of exorcising all harmful influence.' This may be regarded as the usual attitude adopted by rude peoples towards strangers. But as there are always exceptions to the rule, there is an exception which should be observed here. The savage does not shut up his bowels of compassion and kindness against all strangers. There is a delicate chord in his heart which may easily be touched by the sight of even a stranger in misfortune, and he will act the part of the good Samaritan to him, will tend him and help him out of his difficulties. A lowly Negroid woman, finding Mungo Park in dire distress, took him home to her hut, and there revived him with a refreshing meal. And this is not an isolated example of hospitality to strangers shown by uncivilized people. In other districts of the Upper Congo reached by Mungo Park,

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 102.

he met with equally striking examples of kind treatment at the hands of the natives.¹ Now by admitting a stranger under her roof and providing him with victuals, that Negroid woman was putting herself under a further obligation to protect him while he was with her. To suffer him to share a meal with her meant, according to savage ideas, that she was entering into a covenant of friendship with him. He was no longer a stranger, but a brother and friend. Were she to violate the obligation which she incurred in allowing him to share her food, she would be committing an act of sacrilege. It was a widespread practice to cement a bond of friendship between strangers by means of a meal. According to the account given in the book of Joshua, the Israelites were compelled by the unwritten laws of hospitality, after unwittingly eating of the bread of the Gibeonites, to abstain from hostility towards them.² Alliances and friendships with strangers were not only possible, but absolutely necessary to the least advanced groups of men, if they were to make any progress in the world. A small group had no chance of survival unless it took its place as a constituent in a larger body of men.

Alliances, however, were not often formed through the medium of the meal. The mediating instrument in most cases seems to have been blood which was exchanged between the parties. Blood was drawn from a member or members of the clan, and smeared on the stranger, or blood was drawn from both parties and transferred from one to the other, thus visibly and realistically symbolizing

¹ Vide *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii, p. 378.

² Joshua ix. 14, 15.

the union effected between them. 'The exchange of blood is often practised amongst the blacks of Africa, as a token of alliance and friendship. The Mambetta people after having inflicted small wounds upon each other's arms reciprocally suck the blood which flows from the incision.'¹ The Hurons drank the blood of a dead enemy to become invulnerable against the attacks of other enemies (presumably his relatives). After drinking his blood they thought that hostilities between them and his people or relatives *ipso facto* terminated.² Since the life is in the blood, to convey a portion of my own blood to an enemy has the effect of transferring a portion of my life also to him. Hence I should be doing a very unnatural thing, I should be injuring myself by assaulting and harming him.

We have now briefly sketched the manner in which man in uncivilized society conducts himself to his kind. Degraded as he often is, sunk in the mire of foul custom, revelling in the possession of scalps, and feasting on human flesh, there is in him a spark of kindness and a disposition to do right as he understands it. He knows how to live orderly, to be kind to the old and sick, to be loyal to his chief, to be respectful to woman, and to show compassion for a man whom he has never before seen. Such conduct he partly owes to the discipline enforced by his clan. It has been formed in him by coercive measures, by threats of penalty, secular and religious. But the root of the matter was in him when he was born, the disposition to obey, to learn, to conform himself to what

¹ F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 98.

² Vide *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii, p. 205.

is best in the community. And it is in virtue of this inherent quality that he has succeeded in forcing his way onwards and upwards to the highest reaches of modern civilization.

CHAPTER IV

SACRIFICE

THE student will not carry his study far into the beliefs and practices of early races without observing the wide extent and prominence of the practice of sacrifice. It confronts him at every turn, and occupies a very conspicuous position. If he means seriously to prosecute his study he must grapple with this practice, analyse, dissect it, and wrest some meaning out of it. The undertaking will require patience and perseverance since the question bristles with difficulties. Sacrifice assumes an almost endless variety of forms. A dog may be killed and thrown into the sea. An animal may be speared high up in the flanks, and encouraged to walk to and fro until it sinks down and dies. Variety of the form of sacrifice is only one of the difficulties besetting the path of the inquirer. It is not certain that the outward difference implies a difference in the intention and purpose of the sacrifice. Careful and persevering study of the subject seems, however, to reveal one fundamental principle underlying all sacrifices. Although forms and modes vary, one purpose or end is always present more or less in the mind of the sacrificer. It may or may not be combined with other aims and ends, but the purpose itself is always there, for sacrifice would be inconceivable without it. That purpose is to secure the attention of the supernatural, to get into communication with him, to ensure his presence.

The facts known about primitive man do not certainly indicate the *kind* of offering he first made to the supernatural. It may have been animal or fruit, animate or inanimate, for all that we know. Much depends upon whether man in his earliest days was himself a flesh eater. Some savage peoples, at any rate, find their staple diet in the products of the earth, herbs and fruit of trees. An example is furnished by the root-diggers of California.¹ Probably a very old tradition is preserved in the first chapter of Genesis, where it is said that before the flood the green herb and the fruit of the tree were given man for food. After that catastrophe 'every moving thing that liveth shall be food for you; as the green herb have I given you all'. If that be true, then man would originally have approached the powers above with something other than a bleeding animal. Let that be, this much is certain, that bloody sacrifices are not the only offerings made in primitive communities to enlist the aid or secure the presence of the god. Other offerings pass muster in religious ceremonies, or in dealings between men and supernatural agents. The Kayans of Borneo after entering a strange country think it right to get on good terms with the spirits of the land. For this purpose they make an offering of fowls' eggs. 'Each boy (of the party) takes an egg and puts it in a bamboo split at the end into four, while one of the older men calls upon the hills, rocks, trees, and streams to hear him and to witness the offering.'² Sometimes a tree is sup-

¹ C. P. Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion*, vol. ii, p. 144.

² J. G. Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 110; cf. also Hose and McDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, vol. ii, pp. 7, 8.

posed to be the abode of a spirit, and receives offerings from the people in the neighbourhood. These are pieces of clothing which are tied to the tree. The spirit resident in a well or stream is propitiated with similar presents, the worshipper's principal desire, in thus surrendering something of his own to the spirit, being probably to form an attachment between them. Hence when the earliest dim vision of the supernatural opened up to man he may not at once have sought communication with him by means of a slaughtered victim. Something less cumbrous and more convenient may have suggested itself to him. And it was only after the lapse of ages that he hit upon an animal, bird, beast, or fish as the best and most appropriate means of correspondence with the deity. Whatever the truth about that matter be, it is at any rate certain that eventually man in all parts of the world adopted the custom of bloody sacrifices.

What was it that prompted him to select a being of flesh and blood and hand it to the god? Did he think that the god would come and consume it? Almost universally man himself has a liking for flesh meat, and it would be only natural for him to expect his god to have the same taste. But this would only make of sacrifice a means whereby the human being satisfies the hunger of the superhuman. It would be a species of feeding, as though the god who supplies man with various goods should need some of these back for his own consumption. Instances are not wanting which would seem to lend countenance to that view of sacrifice. Man is always inclined to attribute to his god the feelings and wants of which he is conscious in himself. That may be so, and

yet one might seek in sacrifice for some purpose higher than that of satisfying the craving of the deity. Look for a moment at the animal. Its flesh, it will be allowed, man greatly relishes. How is it then that he is so reluctant to kill the animal for food? In the pastoral stages at least the slaughter of a domesticated animal is an exceptional event.¹ He contents himself with drinking its milk, using it as a beast of burden, taking its wool or hair. If he ate flesh it was chiefly the flesh of game. When, however, a sacrifice is needed, he does not spare his domesticated animals. From his herds and flocks he selects the material for the ceremony. It is a legitimate inference that in his opinion the offering consisted of more than flesh and blood. It had constituents not easy to explain and understand, and wherein consisted its fitness for sacrifice. In other words, the animal was good for food, but early man was unwilling to tap that source of supply because there was a sacred and ineffable element in it. Yet for that very reason it was eminently adapted for sacrificial uses.

The reader hardly needs to be reminded that numerous and divergent theories have been propounded in order to explain the rise and spread of sacrifice. It would be interesting and instructive to pass some of these in review, but such a task would be a lengthy process, and would carry us too far from our main purpose. That purpose will be best served by turning our attention at once to a few points which are regarded as true, speaking generally of all sacrifices.

(1) The sacrificial victim is surrounded by a halo of

¹ Vide C. Allen, *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, chap. xv.

sanctity. Its flesh and blood are charged with wondrous properties which mark it off from other creatures not chosen for such a solemn function. What the properties are the native does not explain. We can only gather from his attitude that they stir in him the feeling of awe. Even the low races of Central Australia, whose customs are said to be a routine of unmitigated magic, are very careful at their annual ceremonies to consume only a tiny morsel of the flesh of their totem animal. The morsel they eat is no ordinary piece of flesh, but there is lodged in it a wondrous ingredient which empowers them to influence the supply of the species. The blood again when dashed against a stone has the effect of summoning forth the spirits residing within, and sending them to propagate the species.¹

Blood among all primitive people is a fluid that has a large element of danger in it, and they do their best not to have it about them or within sight. A man slayer who is steeped in blood, or who has only a few stains of it on any part of his body or clothing, is put into quarantine for some time, and has to go through a strict process of purification. The blood of a distinguished official or chief must not flow at all for fear lest something terrible should happen, or if it must come forth from his body it ought not to be allowed to touch the ground.² Why there should have been this precaution is evident if we observe that the blood contains the *life* of the individual. The *life* of man or beast was a puzzle to

¹ B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *Native Tribes of Central Australia*, pp. 170 ff.

² J. G. Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 241.

early man. He could distinguish between the dead and the living, and was profoundly impressed by the contrast. And what makes all the difference is the *life*, something he cannot grasp and hold back. It is an enigma to him, a mystery, and its vehicle, the blood, is a mystery also, and classed among sacred things. The blood of the altar victim is viewed with similar if not with heightened feelings of awe. How nervous a man must be even when he looks at it, more so when he touches it! But what of the bravado of him who draws blood from the victim's body? He is a sacrilegious wretch, who must flee for his life from the vengeance of his fellow worshippers.¹ The Greek word *βουφόνια* is a tacit reminder to us of the fact that in ancient Greece the slaughter of an ox was a murderous act.

(2) The sacrifice immediately brings about the most important thing desired. It places the worshipper face to face with his god. The blood streaming from the victim brings into view the supernatural being. Man beholds there in the red fluid the visible sign of the presence of the deity whom he seeks. If, moreover, he assimilates some of the flesh and blood, the divine life becomes an inner possession. It is blended with his own nature. This statement is indeed open to exceptions and needs some qualification. For the victim, although perhaps always sacred, is not always divine, or a vehicle of the divine. There are cases in which the animal is laid on the altar and its blood shed in order that the god might come there and consume it. The god is attracted by the sacrifice, and being an intangible, ethereal being, is

¹ Cf. G. Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*, p. 111.

supposed to prefer its lighter and less material parts, the fat and the blood. In any case sacrificial blood and flesh were universally credited with potent and mystic virtues. The conclusion deducible from this fact is that the god, the supernatural spirit, was somehow associated with them.

Perhaps the earliest practice (although this is not the view of Dr. Tylor) was for the worshipper to eat a part of the sacrifice himself and leave the rest to the deity, not surrendering to him the whole. This seems to have been the rule among totemites. Their sacrificial ceremony was not complete unless they all took their share. By feasting on the totem animal's flesh the community were subsuming into their natures the qualities for which it was distinguished. If there was a divine quality in the animal, it was absorbed by the eater. Attention has been already drawn to the prevalence of the idea of the transference of qualities from one being to another. Man ate the flesh of powerful and courageous animals in order to acquire their strength and courage, and *mutatis mutandis* he ate the flesh of a sacred and divine animal so as to appropriate its divinity. Is it here that we have the key to the real purpose and meaning of sacrifice? We leave that question open, and content ourselves with laying stress on the need early man felt for the help of, or a share in, a higher life than his own. He was very sensible of his own frailty and weakness, and desirous of an addition to his strength, of some antidote to his feebleness and timidity. Where was he to find the antidote for all

confronted with danger and opposition? There was a sacred source that never failed him. It was the sacrifice whereby he came into contact with or into possession of a superhuman agent or quality.

(3) In the estimation of primitive people the deity is not a *luxury* with which they can dispense or not as they please. There is a positive urgent need for him when the solemnities of sacrificial observances are celebrated. They do not, as a rule, sacrifice except for some clamant and well understood reason. The help of the deity is required, and they are confident that having drawn the deity to them they will find their desire fulfilled. If they are suffering from famine, pestilence, or invasions of enemies, they will seek for relief in sacrifice; when they put their plants and seed in the ground, they are anxious that the power above should prosper the enterprise; when they are laying the foundation of a new building, they will offer a victim, the blood of which is sprinkled under the house to secure its safety.¹ Prayer alone will not be sufficient; they must shed the blood of a man or beast. Sacrifice, looked at from this point of view, is the outward, concrete expression of the spoken or silent desire of the heart. It is a species of acted prayer. The spoken prayer may accompany the visible performance, or it may not. Perhaps ordinarily the sacrificer bodied forth the meaning of the sacrifice in words, explaining what was his intention in the sacrifice. A good example is furnished by Col. Dalton in writing about the Bhagats: 'The person who officiates as priest on the occasion says, "O Mahadeo, we sacrifice this man to you according to

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 346.

ancient customs. Give us rain in due season, and a plentiful harvest." ¹

In order to illustrate further the practice of sacrifice it will be best to describe some few of the *occasions* on which a man brought a beast to a particular spot, and slew it in order to put himself and the god in the right attitude to each other. These occasions were almost always critical times in the life of men. They were periods when disease or pestilence raged; when there was no food to be got, or when violent disturbances of nature terrified them. People on low levels of culture convinced themselves without difficulty that the causes of all their troubles were *living* beings and not blind and mechanical forces. But they faced a problem when they tried to determine what manner of beings these might be. Were they human or other than human, were they like themselves or totally dissimilar? To this question it was hard to find the right answer. Certain it is that their calamities and distresses were at different times attributed to different causes, to the ghosts of ancestors and of departed chiefs, to spirits of evil, or to the gods themselves, who were thus displaying their wrath. But whatever the source of the trouble, there was urgent need that it should be removed, and man had recourse to sacrifice which was considered to be an unfailing source of remedy.

Seized with sickness he imagines himself the victim of some spiteful spirit's anger. What does he do? In like case we take our way to the doctor. Often he did the same, going to the medicine man, who boasted of his

¹ Cf. G. Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*, chap. xv, p. 119.

competency to cure his sickness. But the most popular remedy was sacrifice, which indeed the medicine man himself frequently recommended.

Sacrifice put him in touch with the deity. The offering was presented not that the god might somehow draw it to himself from a distance, but that he might come to receive it, and at the same time visit the offerer. When his attendance is ensured, the offerer is full of hope that he will expel the demon of disease, or, if the disease be sent by the god himself, that he will undo his own work. The sick man, therefore, in order to regain his health needs merely to provide himself with a beast, have it slain, and some of its blood sprinkled on his person and on the wall of his house, or a piece of its flesh placed in his dwelling. In this way the super-human life is brought into close proximity with him, or even actually infused into him. 'In the Yoruba country when a beast is sacrificed for a sick man, the blood is sprinkled on the wall and smeared on the patient's forehead, with the idea, it is said, of thus transferring to him the victim's life.'¹ The patient may eat a portion of the sacred flesh, or it may be eaten for him by his relatives, which will have the same result.²

External nature again was not always favourable to early man, nor invariably kind in its ordering of events. Sometimes it wrought such serious havoc that he felt bewildered. He is fallen on evil days. All things seem to conspire against him. He is helpless, and his own resources are unequal to meet the adverse circumstances.

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 347.

² F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 149.

Something serious has happened to bring all this trouble upon him. What is it? The powers above have abandoned him, and what is much more tragic, they may have had a share in reducing him to such misery. Hence his first business must be to recall them to his side, for he is confident that when once their favour is regained all will soon be well with him. Their presence will be a guaranty that his misfortunes will mysteriously vanish. He would say to himself, 'If my god be with me, then though the hills be moved, and the enemy knock at the gate, I need not fear, for no ill can befall me.' If ill did overtake him it was because his god, his tower of strength, had been alienated, or was absent for some reason. Face to face with a crisis man loses faith in himself, and only the sense of his god's return will restore to him his confidence. The god is brought back through the instrumentality of the sacrifice. His strength and activity are once more enlisted on the people's behalf when, through the medium of the sacrificial victim, he is conveyed into their presence. The people of Celebes in times of public disaster brought forth the regalia of their kings, which, like the Jewish ark of the covenant, were a symbol of the divine presence. These were smeared with buffalo's blood to make surety doubly sure that the god was there, or to bring the god as it were out into the open, and then the evil was stayed.¹ In fact any denizen of the spirit-world could be induced to leave for the time being its abode and come to the rescue of friends in this life who were in trouble. But sacrifice

¹ J. G. Frazer, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, vol. i, p. 363.

must be made by the living before they will succeed in obtaining the spirit's succour. When the people of Dahomey went to war they drew to their aid the ghost of the divine king by shedding blood.¹ It is the blood of the offering which, as it flows, unlocks for them the divine life and protection.

There was no lack of opportunities for the shedding of sacrificial blood. The birth of a child; his attainment of the age of puberty; his marriage; his death, were all occasions which necessitated the slaughter of a victim. These were critical moments when it was felt desirable to place him under the aegis of the god, the sacrifice being requisitioned to effect it. We shall not stop to explain the details of the ceremonies, but must hasten to notice a special season of the year in which savage man was particularly anxious for the aid of the supernatural. At spring-time when the earth experienced a renewal of life, and the living creatures were on the point of multiplying, he did not stand still and look on with indifference while this annual miracle was taking place. It was his duty to dig the ground and sow the seed; he was moreover aware that unless the supernatural life were present with fertilizing powers he could not hope for growth and a mature crop. Its absence would involve failure and famine. To obviate such a dire calamity the life of animal or man must be given up. The seed which waits to be sown is mixed with the victim's blood, and the flesh is cut up and taken to be buried in the fields.² The Pawnees among others

¹ H. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i, p. 266.

² G. Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*, chap. xv.

adopted this realistic and savage method of communicating the supernatural life to the plants and the seed. Sometimes, as among the ancient Celts, the victim instead of being cut up was burnt, and the ashes were afterwards strewn over the field.¹

One is rather apt to assign such practices to the account of magic, the belief of man that he can thus force nature or the powers of nature to do his bidding. If this were the true explanation of the matter, the performance would be carried out in the belief that the desired result would mechanically and inevitably follow. This is indeed the case to a certain extent. Early man relied much on the efficacy of the external rite, with its inherent power to achieve its purpose. But he also believed in a god whose disposition and feelings cannot with impunity be disregarded. If the god is otherwise minded the rite will remain a barren performance. The spirit of growth in the corn or other products belongs to him, or it may be understood as a part of himself, and it is only available for man's use if the god is in a mood to yield it. Anyhow, the victim that is slain at seedtime is believed to embody the corn spirit, which must be released from its prison-house before the earth can furnish its produce in the coming season. How the corn spirit got into the victim is not always clear. The animal may be simply chosen to represent the spirit, or it may have been by chance discovered by the reapers the previous year in the field they were mowing. The animal was in some places killed at harvest time, and made to furnish forth a banquet in which the reapers

¹ Cf. J. A. MacCulloch, *Religion of the Ancient Celts*, p. 235.

participated, the reapers and others engaged in agricultural pursuits thus absorbing, and preserving locked up in themselves, the spirit of growth through the winter months. Among the ancient Germans 'at the harvest supper the spirit of the corn, represented latterly under the form of an animal, but in earlier days as a child, was slain and eaten by those who had aided in the harvest'.¹

What has been said constitutes a strong presumption that the primary intention of sacrifice was to effect a sort of junction between man and his god, to call him back when he is far away into man's presence, or at any rate to put him into close communication with man. A good case can, however, be made out for the theory that sacrifice is primarily a *gift* presented to the god, and this has been done by Dr. Tylor. Many sacrifices, it is true, are of the nature of gifts; but these are made over to the god in the first instance in order that the offerers may induce him to visit them and attend to their wants. By coming to accept the offering he must needs also come into their midst. In this sense a large proportion of sacrifices are legitimately described as *honorific*, as presents, as tangible expressions of the worshippers' compliments and homage to the deity.

The recognition of this aspect of the case in some sacrifices differs widely from the assertion, sometimes made, that all the sacrifices of backward people were carried out in a bargaining and calculating spirit. A man desires a boon and blessing from his god, and he thinks he can extort it only on the *do ut des* principle.

¹ D. G. Brinton, *The Religions of Primitive Peoples*, p. 190.

‘I offer you this in order that you may give me something more valuable in return.’ That is the motive for sacrifice which Plato assures us in his *Republic* to have been the real motive. The god has a weakness for gifts, and his hands are opened wide to those who come before him with presents. We may declare at once that this is a species of bribery and cajolery which is foreign to the simple conditions of primitive life. It belongs rather to the more enlightened and rationalized age of philosophers. The attitude of primitive man to his god is that of a humble dependent, and not that of an astute huckster. The worst that can be said of him is that he tried

‘To make of god his true confederate,
Purveyor to his appetites.’

To deceive and cajole his god, to trick him into giving, was too clever and advanced a method of procedure for primitive man.¹

Piacular and Expiatory Sacrifices. It is time to pass on to piacular sacrifices, which strikingly support and confirm the conclusion already reached in regard to the immediate motive and intention of sacrifice. In these sacrifices as in others man's effort is directed towards bringing about a theophany, an appearance of his god, for the removal of sin and uncleanness. The sense of right and wrong could not be—as in fact it is—universally operative, if it were not a connate inherent possession of man. Under the action of this sense have arisen the rules and customs of primitive races, and if some of them are repugnant to our modern taste it is only

¹ Cf. Albert Réville, *History of Religions*, n. 130.

because rude man's idea of what is good and bad is vague and imperfect. The inner light whereby he lived was dim, giving but faint glimmers. Yet feeble though it was, it enabled him to formulate a number of useful observances without which he would never have progressed at all. Now the sense of sin in early times was nothing more than a feeling in man of having offended against the customs of the community. And it was the community that punished the offender. The latter after transgression is sensible of nothing but of fear of punishment at the hands of his people. No fear of anything further troubles him as an individual. But he does not live an isolated life. He is a part and parcel of the community, which for reasons of its own metes out penalties to wrongdoers. Wrongdoing on the part of one may endanger the safety and life of the whole. It may dislocate the very machinery of nature itself on which people depend for food. Nature might refuse to yield its good things for the people's use. The wrongdoer, therefore, as a member of the community, would also share in this general apprehension.

When, however, there emerged the belief that the god was the author and guardian of the tribal customs, the tribesman who proved refractory began to view his wilful act in a different light. It was an insult not only to the tribe but also to the god. He was by his lawlessness doing despite to the power above who has now turned to be his enemy. The man is a culprit and conscious of his guilt. Until he has regained the divine favour there is no peace for him. He has twinges of conscience which are indicated in the following anecdote.

In North America 'a travelling party had been for three days finding no game, and were in great distress from want of food. On the third night a chief had a dream in which he was shown that they were suffering because they had set out without the sacrificial feast. The Great Spirit had punished them'.¹ The dream of the chief reveals the protest of his conscience or of his inner self against the irregular proceeding of the party. Their fault was, of course, not a heinous one, but then we have to remember that ritual irregularities among primitive folk are as serious as moral offences among ourselves. Granting then that the offender has a sense of guilt, what method must he adopt in order to restore peace to his soul? What he usually does is to offer a sacrifice. The party referred to killed four deer and held a sacrificial feast. They no doubt used for the purpose the animals that could be got with the least trouble. However, there are times when animals are of no avail; they are impotent to remove the disaster either impending or present. So a human being is made to suffer on the people's behalf. There are on record barbarous cases of the Phoenicians offering one of their dearest to Baal in calamitous periods, and of Mesha, king of Moab, slaughtering his son on the wall of the city when the fortune of war was against him.² Mesha, true to the ideas current in his day, viewed the disaster that was about to overwhelm him as a token of the absence of his god. The god had been alienated in some way,^c and the awful sacrifice was set so as to reclaim him for his

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 358.

² 2 Kings iii. 27.

people's safety. At the very last moment the fortune of war would turn in their favour, if only his superhuman powers could be brought into play. When the king parted with that precious possession, his eldest son, the god overlooked any wrong that had been done him and returned to the assistance of his worshippers. The more valuable the offering the more likely it is that the deity will be influenced by it—that seems to be the opinion of barbarous, half civilized, if not of savage races. 'The ancient Germans laid it down that in times of famine beasts should first be slain and offered to the gods. Did these bring no relief, then men must be slaughtered; and if still there was no aid from on high, then the chieftain of the tribe himself must mount the altar.'¹

In cases of extreme misfortune the victim was not always made over entirely to the god. Parts of it are reserved for those engaged in the ceremony. The victim being the vehicle of the sacred life, people have the notion that what is needed to expel from their natures all impurity, and thus conciliate the god, is the assimilation of that life. The piacular sacrifice was something more real than a mere sign or symbol in so far as it had to do with the people. It, in fact, communicated to them its hallowed virtues. In the words of Dr. Robertson Smith, 'the conception of piacular media as purificatory involves the notion that the holy medium adds something to the worshipper's life and refreshes its sanctity'.²

Another and a very impressive method was in vogue for the extirpation of sin and trouble. An animal (or

¹ D. G. Brinton, *The Religions of Primitive Peoples*, p. 188.

² *Religion of the Semites*, p. 427.

man) was seized and the sins of the people were transferred to it. Then loaded with these it was led away to a place where it would be destroyed or whence it might never return. The victim was closely associated with the god, being either his instrument or an embodiment of himself. Among the Gonds of India the deity descends on the head of one of the worshippers who is seized with convulsions, and rushes off to the jungle. He is in that way singled out to bear the sins of the rest of the village.¹ It would be easy to adduce further instances of this mode of the eradication of the feeling of guilt which must have forcibly appealed to the senses of low races.

We hope we have succeeded in demonstrating one fact at least, that the immediate function of the sacrifice was to summon the god as it were to business, to rouse him, if he were inattentive and heedless, to his proper task of forwarding the interests of his worshippers. As he is an invisible and mysterious being his movements are not always evident to the eye of man. But man knows that when he is visited by sad mishaps and troubles, the deity is either indifferent or absent or angry. In such circumstances the god must be fetched back and induced to give his attention. It is in the light of this thought that the practice of sacrifice can be best understood. Sacrifice is the key with which early man unlocks the gate through which he passes into the presence of his god, or through which the god comes forth ready to do man's bidding.

¹ Vide G. Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*, p. 126.

CHAPTER V

PRAYER

AT what stage of his march upward from the lowest level of culture the tongue of man had become sufficiently pliable to express a few simple ideas clearly is an intricate and interesting problem.¹ The acquisition of the gift of articulate speech was admittedly no sudden and unexpected discovery, upon which man lighted by a fortunate accident. The root of the thing was in him from the moment of his first appearance as a human being, but innumerable ages passed away before that root could be made to bud and blossom, and bring forth fruit in the form of serviceable language. Long and constant strivings and efforts were necessary before he was able to clothe the thoughts of his heart in the garb of sound, which his fellows could easily interpret. Yet the prize was worth the effort. It was a possession which gave him an enormous advantage; it was an asset which, as much as if not more than any other quality of man, justified his claim to be lord over other created life.

It may not be out of place here to add a word or two on the benefits which early man derived from his competency to use a number of sound symbols conveying easily understood meanings. He has always been a

¹ The Pigmies of Africa have only a limited monosyllabic language; cf. A. Churchward, *The Origin and Evolution of Primitive Man*, p. 22.

sociable being, partly from necessity, partly from his love of company. Detached from his fellows he is helpless, he will find the unassisted struggle of life too hard for him. He will survive in the struggle for existence only if he lives along with others, helping and being helped. To a man whose safety and happiness compel him to live in society the gift of speech is an inestimable boon. His troubles he need not bear alone, or at least he need not bear them without sympathy, if he is in possession of language. He may tell of them to his fellows, and thereby elicit their fellow feeling if they are disposed at all to feel with him. On the other hand, his own service to his people is the more effective and to the point, if there are means of letting him know explicitly the tasks required of him. Language, then, has a cementing and binding influence over early groups. It holds them together because it is the means whereby the individual learns the ideas and feelings of the whole, and *vice versa*, because it enables the whole to receive a message from the one.

It gives in fact a powerful stimulus to the sociable instincts. Men take more pleasure in each other's company when they can sit down and talk of their mutual experiences, their troubles and joys, their own exploits and those of their forefathers. This social intercourse, which was made possible only by the power of the voice, was of the nature of a school wherein old and young familiarized themselves with the tribal lore. Those gifted above the average, who were possessed of a facile tongue, would take the part of teachers and entertainers. They would not fail to repeat until it became common property whatever there was of value

in the experiences and traditions of the tribe. When, again, the boys were passing out of the irresponsible years of childhood into the more serious years of youth and manhood, and were entrusted with various duties and responsibilities, it was the voice of the elder laying down directions and rules that instilled into their minds clear and definite notions of their duties. There were other methods besides by which the lads were supplied with a knowledge of the practices they were expected to observe and the acts they were to eschew.

At this stage imitation and mimicry were often employed in the instruction of the youths of the tribe. The boy was enjoined to do what was spectacularly enacted in his presence by the older people; and there was intimated to him in the same realistic fashion, by means of gesture, the kind of act he should abhor and renounce. But the language of gesture, although very expressive, does not explain anything in detail. The boy is in this way instructed in respect of his broad, general duties. He is enlightened on the kind of marriage connexion he must form. He thus learns whether the women of his own clan are prohibited to him, and whether the women belonging to other groups are allowed. Yet there are numerous details of information in regard to the relationship between the sexes, between the old and the young, and so on, which the speaking voice alone is able to make clear.

If savages had no language, much of the wisdom and discipline which characterizes them would tend before long to fall into the background and be forgotten. The

non-existent. The prayers sent up by them to the deity would never have been phrased, and the records of them would have been impossible.

The preservative effects of language are great. It is a casket in which is handed down from father to son the heirlooms of the precious sayings and doings of the past of the tribe. It is no wonder, therefore, that words and phrases came to assume a degree of importance far beyond that which was originally attached to them. Take for example the magical formula, or the spell, as it is called. Why should two or three words put together in a certain way and uttered with emphasis be deemed to have such wonderful consequences? The only explanation can be that phrases or words have become important through constant use, or by reason of their antiquity. At one time they conveyed a thought or feeling in a simple expressive form, and thereby managed to secure their hold on the consciousness of the community. They were thus on everybody's lips. No one was ignorant of them. The children as soon as they commenced chattering were taught them, and passed them on in turn to their children. This process went on until perhaps the original meanings of the words and sentences were lost, but the sentences themselves were not thrown on the dust heap.¹ They were too valuable for that. They were rather converted to other uses, magical in intent.² The sorcerer and the witch found in them weapons of no mean calibre.

¹ Cf. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, pp. 372-3.

² The mystical formulae used in connexion with the Eleusinian and other mysteries were probably corrupt survivals of what were once common well-understood expressions. The mysteries are admitted to have preserved at least antique customs and usages.

What bearing, it may be asked, has this on the subject of prayer? It is this. Some anthropologists assure us that man commenced praying to his god after the spell had been evolved to perfection, and after experience had proved to the community in general that its performances belied its claims, that in fact it did not and could not promote the public welfare. Further, it became a positive source of danger when it was exploited by individuals for their own private ends. After the experiment of the spell had failed, another must be sought to replace it. This was prayer to superhuman beings, who had now in the general belief come to interfere in the affairs of life.¹ There is something very plausible about the view we have described. It makes the more worthy and seemly practice follow and not precede the less worthy and cruder practice; that is, religion and prayer in the upward movement of the human race are conceived to have come into existence after magic and the spell. Is not this a very insecure foundation upon which to build a theory? Is our knowledge of the life-conditions of primitive man sufficient to justify us in saying that his first attempts to bring under his control the gigantic forces of the world were magical? There cannot be two opinions as to the answer in the mind of an impartial judge of the evidence. The evidence is *not* adequate, and one is therefore forced to look for some other explanation of the facts.

The suggestion has been already thrown out, and is

¹ This is the view of Dr. J. G. Frazer; cf. A. Lang, *Magic and Religion*, p. 57, and R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, p. 37.

now reiterated, that religion became an active factor in the life of man when he was thrown into a flutter, perplexed and awed by the extraordinary manifestations of nature. While he paused in wonder at what should happen next, and experienced those moments of anxious suspense, there dawned upon him a belief in an order or species of beings unlike any that he had hitherto seen, and beyond comparison more powerful and terrifying. The unusual appearances which caused him fright were flashes of their wills, or, if one being only of the higher order filled his vision, they were

‘ A flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo,
they are! ’¹

He had, of course, only a vague, hazy idea of the kind of being that thus revealed himself in power, but there arose spontaneously to his lips a prayer to that being that he would not be too hard on him. If, however, he had not yet learnt to use articulate sounds or words, there was still the wish formed in his heart that the power above would be lenient to him. His first prayer may have been an unexpressed wish, or at least a string of incoherent sounds like the wild chatter of an excitable child. For as there is a period when the child's tongue has not yet learnt to express his wishes intelligibly, so it was with man when he first tried to pray. He felt it did not matter whether his prayer was distinctly uttered or not; the supernatural would know. ‘ In Africa the Zulus, addressing the spirits of their ancestors, think it even

¹ R. Browning, *Abt Vogler*.

enough to call upon them without saying what they want, taking it for granted that the spirits know.¹ If the spirits of the forefathers have the knack of ascertaining what the people feel and think before it is spoken, the supernatural spirits can be relied upon to find out. The Khonds of Orissa tell the Earth goddess that they are ignorant of what is good for them. The goddess knows, and she is asked to give it.² That sense of the god's omniscience was to a greater or less extent a possession of man from the very beginning. And hence it was not a matter of much moment to him whether his prayer was couched in distinct words or not. At all events, it is more probable because more natural, that prayer grew in this manner than that it came into vogue when spell had become obsolete, or was proved to be barren in results. The futility of trying to give spell a priority in time over prayer, or to relate them as parent and child, to regard the latter as having emerged from the former like the butterfly from the chrysalis, is apparent if we ponder a little over typical instances of both. A Delaware prays: 'O Great Spirit there above. Have pity on my children, and my wife. Prevent that they shall mourn for me! Let me succeed in this undertaking, that I may slay my enemy, and bring home the tokens of victory to my dear family and my friends.'³ Let us put side by side with this prayer the following incantation or spell. When preparing for war in ancient Peru the people used to withhold food from certain black sheep for some days, and then slew them in their starving condition, uttering the

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 332.

² Ibid., p. 335.

³ Ibid., p. 332.

incantation: 'As the hearts of these beasts are weakened, so let our enemies be weakened.'¹ There is nothing in common between these two instances except the motive, the need in man's heart that inspires them, and puts the prayer or spell in motion. All is not well with man; something troubles him. He is confronted by an enemy whom he is anxious to rout, but cannot without more than human aid. In his state of helplessness he endeavours to press into his service mysterious agencies. In the one case it is the god whose aid is desired, in the other it is the magical efficacy of the spell that is requisitioned. He would not pray if everything he wanted came to him of its own accord, nor would he use the spell. Both practices have their birth in the desires, longings, and aspirations of men, but after their birth they part company and never meet again. Ever after they stand on an altogether different plane, and there is no easy gliding passage from the one to the other. They are not related as oak and acorn, as fruit and bud.

The very world of the praying man is essentially unlike the world of the magician. The attention of the former is centred upon a supernatural Providence, without whose will and pleasure no good thing can come; while the latter is convinced that his own devices and studied sentences will, if correctly carried out and recited, achieve for him everything in heaven and earth. How can spell, therefore, be alleged to be the antecedent, and the *necessary* antecedent of prayer? It can only be because, as we are reminded by Dr. Jevons, those who make the allegation are labouring under a 'mis-

¹ Vide R. R. Marett, *Threshold of Religion*, p. 63.

conception of the process of evolution'.¹ They think the bad, the ugly, and the superstitious *must* precede in time the better, the more attractive and reasonable practice.

Sometimes an intermediate form is employed which seems to partake as much of the spell as of the prayer. In the Kei Islands in time of war the women anoint pebbles which they place on a board using this invocation : ' O Lord, sun and moon, let the bullets rebound from our husbands just as raindrops rebound from these objects which are smeared with oil.'² It might be plausibly contended that in an example of this nature there is supplied the ' missing link ' that joins on the prayer to the spell. But if we look at it closely it is nothing of the kind. Instead of being a hybrid, a mixture of the two elements so inextricably woven together that the one cannot be dissociated from the other without detriment to both (as it would have been if it were something intermediate between the prayer and the spell), it is in fact an example of a prayer reinforced by a little magic. The women who anointed the pebbles attached two strings to their bow, so that if the one snapped the other might prove effectual. The prayer does not depend for its efficacy on the magical act ; there is only an idea in the minds of the women that if the prayer failed, their own act might accomplish something. Sympathetic or imitative acts, be it remembered, were credited with more power than can be easily imagined.

Man's mood and temper are not the same while he is

¹ F. B. Jevons, *The Idea of God*, p. 122.

² Quoted from Frazer's *Golden Bough* in R. R. Marett, *Threshold of Religion*, p. 77.

engaged in prayer as when he is ejaculating a magical formula. In the latter case, he feels that he is master of the situation, and by the exercise of the instrument in his hand he can make or destroy. In the former case, on the other hand, he is a humble suppliant, recognizing his complete subjection to a superior being, who as sole possessor of everything of worth gives and refuses just as he pleases. While such is the normal attitude of man in prayer always and everywhere, he is still not an abject, cringing creature before his god, too nervous and bewildered to prefer his petitions in confident and vigorous tones. Indeed, when he is about to draw near to the deity he feels somewhat nervous and shy, as is indicated by his due preparation of himself by fast and purification. His sense of unworthiness for the sacred interview troubles him. The priest who acts for the people, coming as he does into a special relationship with the god, must needs be exceptionally particular in the matter of his diet as well as his conduct. Among the Ojibways, e.g., the man who performs holy functions must fast and practise strict continence.¹ Both priest and people have misgivings as they embark on sacred business, but having once ushered themselves within the circle of the god's presence they speak to him as to a familiar friend; they are as communicative as is the child of to-day to his parents. There is no favour which they will not venture to ask if they are very much in need of it, and they can be importunate and persistent in their entreaty.²

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 159.

² C. P. Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion*, vol. ii, p. 142.

The few prayers on record make this abundantly clear. The savage prays in no half-hearted fashion, as though he doubted the existence of his god, or his ability to help him. The god is no stranger dwelling far away whose intentions are puzzling to the suppliant. He is close at hand, brought near by the sacrifice that has been offered, and man talks to him as familiarly as he would to his most intimate acquaintance. When the worshipper has learnt to formulate articulate prayers the god has also come to be an articulate being, standing there before man, with ears to listen, with a mind to understand, and a will to respond. If he at one time dwelt as a strange or awesome being in a dark background, almost unapproachable, he does so no longer, and man offers his prayers with hopefulness. These prayers are requests made to a being whose goodness has been tested and upon whose friendship and goodwill the people may rely.

The mainspring of prayer is the soul's unsatisfied desire, combined with a belief in a power able to set the desire at rest. Men would not turn to any beings, natural or supernatural, for relief if they were aware of their impotence to aid them in any way. Would the most destitute beggar stop a man in the street and ask him for money, well knowing that he was as penniless as himself? Prayer, then, comes forth from the lips of man because his god, to whom the prayer is addressed, has the means and the disposition to grant it. So much is implied in all prayer even among the lowest and most degraded savages. Another element universally present is the felt need which gives wings as it were to the petition. Let us turn to this latter aspect of prayer.

What kind of need was it that first impelled man to convey by means of prayer a message to the supernatural? This question would be rather perplexing were it not for the fact that human beings are in their fundamental nature much the same everywhere. The elemental and primal needs of the civilized man are on all fours with those of the wild man of the cave and the woods. Among these needs some are more urgent and imperative than others. Such is man's anxiety to escape with his life when he is in imminent peril of death. Nothing can be more intensely felt than that. It is characteristic of us all. Help at such a juncture is more acceptable and desired than at any other time. And it is extremely likely that man's first prayer shaped itself in circumstances which threatened to cut short his life. His feeling then was that of the Psalmist : ' Save me, O God ; For the waters are come in unto my soul ' .¹

Prayers which have as their objective deliverance from danger and misfortune, are man's first experiment in the habit of prayer ; they stand in the forefront of the multitude of petitions which ascend from the lips of primitive man to the object of his worship. They are more insistent, have more of the soul of the worshipper in them than any others. The prayer of the Rig-Veda, ' take away our calamities ', rises with a warmth of feeling from men's hearts. Their own efforts appearing to be vain, they lift spontaneously their voices in supplication. When rude man has a dangerous business on hand, such as war, the sense of the danger he incurred is poignant in the extreme. The occasion is just the one for prayer. The Osages, a people of North America, furnish us with a

typical example. 'Great Spirit,' they say, 'come down—Fire and Earth—help us to overthrow our foes.'¹ The Huron Indians, who were on friendly terms with a rock-demon, utter this prayer to him: 'Demon, who dwellest in this place, help us, keep us from shipwreck, defend us against our enemies.'² Underlying such utterances there was often a consciousness of guilt, a feeling on the part of the suppliant that the calamities which had overtaken him, or which he feared were impending, were more or less deserved. He had wronged and slighted the god; his actions had been blameworthy, and he knows that he must mend his ways if he would find his god amenable to his requests. The petition referred to above from the Rig-Veda is supplemented by a wish that the god would 'chastise those who observe no sacred rites'. The neglect of the sacred rites of which some were guilty was tantamount to a committal of the very worst offence, and the community in consequence had to suffer at the hands of the divine ruler. Their neglect was an insult to him. In the disasters with which the people as a whole were visited he was avenging himself for the wrong done him.

Another class of prayers, and a very wide one, comprises those in which man begs for blessing on himself and on his family, for good health and prosperity. A striking Turanian prayer is quoted by Dr. Tylor from the folk-lore of Esthonia. The worshipper draws blood from his forefinger and exclaims: 'I name thee with my blood, and vow to thee with my blood, and point thee out my buildings to be blessed, stables and cattle-pens and hen-roosts; let them be blessed through my blood

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 247.

² *Ibid.* p. 180.

and thy might.'¹ 'I pray for a healthy body,' says the Amazulu to the Amatonga (i.e. departed spirits), 'that I may live comfortably; and thou So-and-So treat me with mercy.'² This prayer, although addressed to ancestral spirits, is modelled on prayers to supernatural, non-human spirits, and the apparent reason for it is that both classes of spirits from many points of view hold a similar relationship to man. The relationship is that of superior to inferior, of patron to client, of giver to receiver.

Man is frequently said to be a creature of circumstances. He has no power of himself to help himself, but must needs bow and yield himself body and soul to the various forces that play about him. Whether that is true generally of modern life may be a debatable question. It is certainly applicable to conditions of life in early society. There man *is* a creature of circumstances, or perhaps we ought to say, a creature, a puppet, wholly at the mercy of a promiscuous crowd of invisible beings. They may do whatever they like with him, assault him and toss him about as if he were a mere plaything. Having but a very imperfect notion of the laws of health he is disposed to attribute his sicknesses and diseases to the interference of these denizens of the spirit-world. They are the real causes of all his troubles, and he can neither foresee nor prevent them. At any rate his *own* efforts are unavailing. His only hope lies in securing the co-operation of his god. He prays to him to deliver him from these disease-infecting visitants, and grant him a strong vigorous body.

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 364.

² H. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i, p. 270.

The highest ambition of early man is satisfied when his body is aglow with health. In such a condition he accomplishes with ease and pleasure his usual tasks.¹ He is a more useful member of the community. His fellows admire and envy his capacity for exertion and endurance. He will, therefore, not neglect to pray for such a priceless boon as health and courage. When these are missing life is joyless and burdensome. Possessed of them he is as merry as a child. But the possession of them does not dispense him from further dependence on the god for his mercies. However robust of body he is, his own efforts alone will not avail to bring supplies to his door. He may fight and fight hard for his daily bread; he may hunt or fish for days together, but all in vain unless he has the supernatural powers working in unison with him. Nature is the god's handiwork, and whether it operates favourably or otherwise will depend upon him. Since he holds the directing lever of the machine of nature, he is requested to direct it for his people's good. The Algonquins at their meals throw fat into the fire, saying to the spirits: 'Make us find food.'² The Tannese high priest in the Papuan Islands prays: 'Compassionate father! Here is some food for you; be kind to us on account of it.'³ A Dakotah when going to hunt utters this prayer: 'Spirits or ghosts, have mercy on me, and show me where I can find a deer.'⁴

Looked at in this light prayer is a practice as obligatory

¹ Cf. Hose and McDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, vol. ii, p. 7.

² E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii, p. 349.

³ Ibid., p. 330.

⁴ H. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i, p. 271.

on man, and as necessary to his existence, as the use of his hands in fishing and hunting. It is not a matter of indifference whether he prays or not ; prayer is not a superfluous exercise which can be neglected or practised just as the fancy takes a man. It is, on the contrary, as essential to him as breathing. The god is the source of all good gifts. He either holds them in his hands or they are under his control and at his disposal. Man having nothing that he can call his own, must acknowledge his dependence on the god for what he has and is. His position is that of a borrower, and the god is lender or giver.

The god gives freely and bounteously, but only after man has asked him. The good gifts do not fall down unbidden as the rain from heaven. They are rather showered in answer to the prayer that has been sent up. Moreover the god is not laid under constraint by the prayer, compelled by it to part with a few of the blessings which he commands. Prayer does not work *ex opere operato*. The god is not obliged to answer all and sundry prayers offered to him. He gives not as a matter of obligation and duty, but out of his generosity and care for man. That being the case, man feels he can do nothing better in the way of repayment to the deity for his bounty than give him thanks.

The feeling of gratitude springs up naturally in the heart of the simple savage after his request to the god has been granted. The Basuto says : ' Thank you, gods, give us bread to-morrow also.'¹ To the Amazulu, who after an abundant harvest had not discharged this duty,

¹ F. B. Jevons, *The Idea of God*, p. 143.

the head of the village related a dream in which it was announced to him: 'How is it, when you have been given so much food, that you do not give thanks?'¹ The words *εὐχή* and *votum*, which may mean 'prayer' or 'vow', are a reminder to us of the custom in early Greece and Rome to promise something to the god if the prayer were answered, as a proof of the people's appreciation of the god's beneficence.

We have endeavoured to fix upon the proper place occupied by prayer among primitive groups of people; to observe the motives that actuate it, the desires and longings of which it is the expression. The simple needs of early man do not cover a large variety of objects. They do not take a wide range or compass. They may all be classified into petitions for deliverance from danger, for food and for health. Needs, of course, become wider in their scope and more complex with the growth of culture and morals. There arises a desire for forgiveness of sins, for purity and honesty, for moral freedom and self-control. Of these needs early man was not conscious, and therefore did not pray for them. It could not be otherwise while he remained unaware of his own individuality and personal responsibility. In fact he had no individuality, no life of his own to live as distinct from the corporate life which he shared with others. He could not hold the internal colloquy which arises from a sense of personal independence and freedom. 'I have wronged my chief or my neighbour when I might have refrained, therefore I am guilty and nobody else, and I deserve punishment.' It is doubtful whether the idea of

¹ H. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i, p. 260.

himself as 'I' ever occurred to him. If it did, it was in a very rudimentary form. Like the modern child he shuns the first person singular pronoun, and when he wishes to say something himself, almost invariably includes his own self with others and says, '*we* have done this,' or if he must use the singular he substitutes his name for the pronoun 'I' and says, 'So-and-So (Richard or William) has done this.' Hence to pray for the forgiveness of his own individual sins would be foreign to his mode of thought. He had desires which were his own and nobody else's which might occasionally, if he gave them the rein, bring him into trouble. If they did, he would ask the deity to extricate him from his trouble; he would pray to be delivered from the consequences of his evil desire, but not for power to conquer the desire. Indeed his prayers were always efforts to secure the gratification of his passions and not to check and control them.

The North American Indians cry and sing to the Great Spirit 'for plentie and victorie'. But supposing the spirit refused to answer the prayer for 'plentie', would the Red Indian deem his own request to be wrong? It is not likely. He discovers a reason in the god's reluctance to grant the prayer rather than in the unworthiness of the petition. The same prayer for plenty will still be preferred by the Red Indian, who, having no conception of the duty of contentment, sees no reason why he should not ask for abundance. Here is seen the broad difference between the prayer of primitive man and the prayer of the genuine Christian. Both have instincts which clamour for satisfaction. The one prays to his god to grant him what he wants, to gratify his bodily cravings, whether

or not they deserve the divine approval. The other prays, 'thy will be done.' He also has many longings of body, of mind and heart, but he would not have them gratified unless that be the good pleasure of God. His own will holds quite a subordinate place, and must only have its way in so far as it is in harmony with the divine will.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORLD OF THE DEAD

IN the savage and uncivilized regions of the world all people, whose beliefs and practices have come to light, are seen to be aware of the simple fact that man is a dual being, compounded of two parts, body and soul or life. The existence of the soul, of course, is not so evident to them as that of the body, but they cannot fail to notice its presence. A dead body lies limp and motionless, whereas alive it moves about, sees, hears, and talks. What makes the difference? That it is the presence or absence of the soul is the common belief of primitive folk. A living man is not a mere body, but a body with a soul, the breath or vapour which he exhales being a visible token of the presence of the soul. Further, the soul is not an abject servant of the body, tied down to it and compelled always to be at its behest and service. The soul is not thus enslaved, for it may make its exit from the body, or re-enter it just as it feels inclined.

This dual view of human nature appears to be universal among the rudest races of the globe, and in all probability was cherished by our own palaeolithic ancestors.¹ As its corollary we find another very widespread idea, viz. that the soul does not share the fate of the body at death, nor does it then come to the end

¹ Vide article by J. A. MacCulloch, *Expos. Times*, Aug. 1906.

of its activity. It is supposed to continue a separate existence unhindered in its freedom of movement by the lack of a corporeal tenement.

The origin of the idea of the soul's continued activity is not easy to discover. One may reasonably suppose that man was born with a disposition to believe in the imperishable nature of his soul. But his belief would have remained a mere belief destitute of any vigour, unless it had found support in the facts of his inner or outer life. Look at a few of the facts. Man from the first was doubtless capable of dreaming about anything or anybody that affected him in any way. Various shapes would arise before his mind while he lay fast in sleep, like pictures thrown by limelight on a canvas. Some of his dreams would rejoice his heart, others would cause him to wake up in fright. Would not some of his dreams introduce to him the familiar aspect of his dead friend or relative, or alas! the dreadful appearance of a dead enemy? There need be no hesitation about our answer. If the savage dreams at all, there is nothing to prevent his dreaming about friends or enemies who have passed away. If he observes them while he is asleep, this is to him as strong a testimony that they are alive as if he were to notice them moving about with his eyes wide open. For the substance of dreams is not to him an illusion of his senses, an unreal, shadowy phantasm, but a real, concrete fact. No argument of the matter-of-fact European will shake him in his conviction. The dead *must* be alive in some form because he has seen them in dreams.

Again sleep in his opinion stands practically on the

same footing as death. The body in sleep lies prostrate and helpless, because the soul has taken its departure. It is only after its return that the sleeper awakes and resumes his activity. Sometimes the unsophisticated native will say that he has visited a distant camp during the night, but when he is informed that he had not left his bed, he is surprised, and satisfies himself with supposing his soul to have been on a journey.¹ In the case of a body lying cold in death the same explanation suggests itself to him. The soul has gone away, and the savage will exercise what persuasion and device he can to allure it back to the body of his friend.² If it does not return, it is not because it has been annihilated. The real reason is that it has either lost its way, or does not care to come back. Thus in the psychical and mental conditions of the savage nature there is ample inducement and stimulus provided to a belief in a future life.

The savage does not stop at the mere belief. If the soul does not resume its place in the dead body it is not at once forgotten by the living. In fact they are very much concerned about it. They will do all in their power to secure its happiness and comfort. But this is only possible if they know of the ghost's whereabouts. They are sure it sojourns somewhere, and have no difficulty in finding out the place it usually frequents. In the most primitive form of society there was as yet no stereotyped tradition of a well-defined region in the world or out of it where souls congregated after leaving

¹ Sir Everard im Thurn, *Indians of Guiana*, pp. 344 f.

² F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 45.

the body. It is commonly supposed in early communities that the ghost is not far from the body to which it was formerly united. It has still a certain sympathy and affection for its old yoke-fellow, and will linger about near it for days and months. The following considerations will render this beyond dispute:

(a) Where earth burial is practised the ghost hovers near the grave; and in order that it may find access to the body a funnel-shaped hole is made in the grave through which it may pass in and out. Or a trench is constructed in the vicinity, and in this food is laid for its benefit.¹ The close attachment of the ghost to the buried body is a belief so prevalent that it hardly needs mention. The Veddahs of Ceylon, if one of them died in a cave which they had made their home, left it and allowed it to be monopolized by the spirit of the deceased.² Probably they surrendered the cave more from fear than from any other motive. Among the ancient Germans and other Aryan peoples a different practice prevailed. They loved to have the spirits of their ancestors near them, and to ensure it buried their dead under their hearths. In consequence the hearth where the spirits had their abode became a sacred spot, an altar. In modern times an example of a similar kind is furnished by the Chinese and Japanese, who have special compartments in their houses where the shades of their ancestors are fed and worshipped. Where the body is, there the ghost is sure to be moving about.

(b) If the ghost is a source of terror, then the savage

¹ Cf. G. H. Jones, *Dawn of European Civilization*, p. 532.

will as a matter of course try and remove the body to as great a distance as possible from the living. Either this is done, or leaving the man where he died the survivors flee away out of sight, and build their huts elsewhere. But even then they continue subject to nervous terrors, for remarkably enough they believe that in spite of the attraction of the dead body the ghost can nevertheless roam to considerable distances. It is not *always* confined to the near neighbourhood of the grave. Frequent visits are paid by it to the living, when it interferes with their affairs. It is not an unusual thing for ghosts to crowd at night-time into the villages for no commendable purpose. They are on the look out for sleeping men and women whose souls for the nonce are away, and having found them enter the empty soulless bodies, in order thus to enjoy a further lease of life under the old conditions.¹ We have already referred to the welcome or unwelcome visits paid by ghosts to a sleeper in his dreams. All this goes to show that a man's soul after it is separated from the body is still within reach. The body keeps it within a certain radius outside which it is not likely to go until it is absolutely forgotten by the living. How real is the fear of an officiant at the funeral of a Limbu of Bengal! 'He delivers a brief address to the departed spirit on the general doom of mankind and the inevitable succession of life and death, concluding with an exhortation that he is to go where his fathers have already gone, and not come back to trouble the living in dreams.'²

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, p. 68.

² Sir H. H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, ii. 19.

(c) In connexion with the point before us, reference may be made to a very persistent belief that the ghost may enter and inhabit a form other than the human. Most totemic people look forward to rejoining their totem at death. Since they are all descended from the totem animal, their ghosts, by entering the sacred animals, are only reoccupying abodes where they dwelt before.

Indeed, the tenderness and kindness which people display towards certain animals are not seldom owing to a belief that they are the living embodiments of the spirits of their forefathers. On the other hand, a beast that inspires terror is a human enemy in disguise. The tiger that comes across their path is to the Jacoons a sample of this kind of transformation.¹ Mohammed would not eat lizards because he believed them to be the descendants of a clan of Israelites who had been metamorphosed.² In the folk-tales of early Celts it is not an unusual thing for heroes to find themselves changed into the forms of animals and birds. The very idea of such transformations has its origin in this one fact, that the soul of a man after it has made its exit from his body continues to live near its old home, and is free to enter as it pleases the bodies of other creatures. There are also cases in which a ghost will seek its final resting-place in a tree. In Southern Nigeria there is a village noted for its sacred tree. Into this, the villagers say, their spirits will go when their earthly career is over.³

¹ Vide F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 16; also W. W. Skeat, *Malay Magic*, p. 157.

² W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Ancient Semites*, p. 88.

³ F. Clodd, *Animism*, p. 74.

In course of time as the imagination of early man plays more and more on the grim aspect of death, the more complete appears to him the severance thereby effected between the body and soul. Death does not merely release the soul as a bird from its cage and allow it to flit about in the immediate neighbourhood, but transfers it to an altogether different region. Hence arises a view of the world divided into two departments, one for the living and the other for the dead. Death stands on the dividing line, and is the agent who conveys the spirit of man across from the one to the other. The two abodes no longer coincide or even overlap. They have become quite distinct. Man, when he dies, goes on a long journey and will never more move amid the scenes of his earthly life, except perhaps during an occasional visit. If it be asked whither does he go, in what part of the world lies the region of the dead, an answer will be forthcoming. The tradition of his people has something to say on the matter. But there are also other peoples with their traditions, probably different. Hence the result that the final habitation of souls is located in more than one direction. One tradition places it below, another above or in the west. Various circumstances influenced people in determining its situation. The prevailing custom of earth burial would tend to make them look for it below the earth, a district which is supposed to be passed every night by the sun. Thus the natives of Encounter Bay and Mangaia tell us that night after night the realm of the departed obtains the light of the sun.¹

¹ F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the History of Religion*, p. 307.

Earth burial, however, was not practised everywhere, and even where it was the custom there was no uniformity of belief as to the abiding place of the dead. In ancient Celtic lore it was variably located on a far-off island, beneath the earth, or under the sea or lake. The migratory habits of early races have been accountable for something in this connexion. A group of people having removed from one district to another are very apt to preserve precious memories of the old land, and as these memories gradually fade, the home of the ancestors assumes an aureole of mystery. What more natural than that the spirits of the people should at death return to that mysterious far-off land? This was doubtless why the Celts imagined the place of spirits to be on a distant island.¹

Again, the western region where the sun sets is accounted the receptacle of departed souls. We are all of us familiar with and fascinated by a lovely sunset. Immature as the aesthetic sense of primitive people may be, they are nevertheless conscious of the glory of the setting sun. They are so affected by the sight that the spirit within them longs to wing its way to such a delightful place. During life here it is impossible, but when life is over will not the spirit find its way thither? Amid these longings and surmisings there emerged the notion of the west as the place where souls finally congregate. Here they are taken up by the sun who conveys them to the realm underneath the earth.

Very soon, however, tradition as among the Egyptians makes a distinction between the bright region of the west

¹ Vide Sir E. Anwyl, *Celtic Religion*, p. 61.

and the subterranean abyss. The one it reserves for the brave, the noble, and the good, the other for the cowardly, the base-born, and the bad. According to Mr. A. Lang in his *Magic and Religion*, the natives of New South Wales are in line with Egyptians, Greeks, Red Indians, Fijians, and Aztecs in teaching that there is a place for good souls and a place for the bad, and that there is a gulf between this world and those other realms of heaven and hell.¹ The dark place below is hell, the bright sunny west is heaven or the land of the blessed. Yet after these wider conceptions have gained currency people continue to believe in the possibility of denizens of the spirit-world returning on a visit, harmful or otherwise, to this world. Stories are told of marriages between inhabitants of both spheres.² An intimation of such transactions is contained in the name of Arthur's wife, Gwenhwyfar, which means 'the White Spectre'.

Leaving now the question of the *locality* of the dead we turn our attention to the disposition of the ghost, and the nature of its feelings towards the living. It has been seen that while it lingered on within sight as it were of its body, it had endless opportunities for promoting or retarding the interests of its old friends, of cheering or frightening, of favouring or harming them. How does it usually conduct itself? Is it hostile or friendly, ready to do a good or a bad turn to its acquaintances in this workaday world? This is a question which has given rise to the most prolific speculation. Writers of the temper of Herbert Spencer allege that the ghost is always an object of fear, that it is inclined only to mischief, and that

¹ p. 74.

² J. Rhys, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 265.

man is preoccupied with the task of keeping it in good humour by feeding it with various dainties. Such is the theory crudely stated. In this shape no one will care to advocate it to-day unless he is prepared to ignore or explain away a great deal of adverse evidence. We are informed by Brinton, a distinguished anthropologist, that at least one-third of the tribes who are known to have dealings with ghosts regard them as friendly.¹ There can be no doubt that men everywhere experience a feeling of nervousness, if not of alarm, at the sight of a ghost. Why should this be so? If they should see the faces of their dead friends in dreams they would hardly be scared; they would be rather pleased than otherwise. The fact of the matter is, that the ghost is usually at large during the night, the very time when people are most susceptible to terrors and fears. The savage is driven to the most absurd panic and hysterics if he sees or hears anything uncommon in the dark. The ghost is a strange uncanny object. It has the shape and form of a man, but is yielding to the touch as a shadow. One cannot grasp it, for there is nothing there to hold, and it vanishes through the most solid and obstinate substances. No wonder then that man feels uncomfortable when it obtrudes its presence on him. He has also a strong suspicion that the ghost is more powerful in its new state than it was before. Death instead of lowering its vitality has increased it. These facts then, that the ghost comes abroad in the silent and dark hours of the night, that it is no solid body with bones and flesh, that its power is heightened, are sufficient to explain the fear that spon-

¹ *Primitive Religions*, p. 73.

taneously springs up in man's heart if he is confronted by a ghost.

We have in mind, of course, the ghost of a friend and not that of an enemy. There is no knowing the extent of the mischief in which the latter may indulge. If a man who hates me expires, I am not henceforth immune from his hatred. His ghost will harbour malice, and I shall be likely to fare ill if I happen to fall in its way. 'While the spirit of a murdered man is feared by everybody, it is natural that it should be specially dreaded by those against whom he may be conceived to bear a grudge.'¹ On the whole the evidence pertinent to the subject seems to bear out the idea that our enemy will continue to be our enemy beyond death, and our friend will remain our friend. Death does not change the feelings of the spirit of man, it rather lends them a greater intensity and keenness. These remarks are obviously not applicable to people who have reached a higher level of development. The men of the Homeric age, the Babylonians or the early Israelites, thought of the ghost as of a weak nerveless thing scarcely capable of any sensation or feeling. The people with whom we are concerned are more primitive, and lower in the scale of culture. With them the ghost is an active, vigorous agent whom they cannot disregard. The treatment it metes out to them is favourable or unfavourable according to the treatment it experienced during life. In Florida 'sometimes a person has reason to think, or fancies, that he has offended his dead father, uncle, or brother. In that case no special intercession is required; the patient himself or one of the family will

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, p. 61.

sacrifice, and beg the *tindalo* (ghost of power) to take the sickness away ; it is a family affair. But if the *tindalo* be that of a stranger, a doctor is called in to identify and propitiate it'.¹ It is well to bear in mind this distinction between the ghost of a stranger or enemy, and that of a kinsman or friend. The latter has the best interests of its living relatives at heart. The above instance will bear this out. Though the dead relative has visited a son or nephew with sickness, his reason for doing so is not pure spitefulness. The patient is punished for not having loyally performed the duties expected of him. The ghost fills the offices of a police ; it acts as a guardian of good conduct. It insists upon the observance of tribal rules. Among the Banyoros of Uganda a man was killed by lightning because he was guilty of some sin, or because of an act of unfaithfulness on the part of his community. The angry ancestors thus vented their displeasure on the man whom they struck dead.² Examples to the same effect may be quoted in abundance from histories of China and Japan. It is said to be the dead rather than the living who really rule in these countries. The ancestors preserve from infringement the rules of order and discipline more effectually than the voice and threats of living rulers. The old traditions and practices are a precious possession to the living, because they are so precious to the dead.

There is hardly any limit to the tokens of friendliness and goodwill shown by the ancestors. The people may be perplexed with a problem such as this : some person has committed a breach of tribal rule for which they all

¹ R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians*, p. 194.

are punished, but the culprit has not been identified. In their perplexity they bethink themselves of the ancestral spirits and invoke their aid. In Melanesia the spirit is summoned by means of a bamboo into which it is supposed to come, and the offender is pointed out by the motion of the stick. A person in great pain will call on some dead friend to come and relieve him of his suffering. The dead friend is expected to appear to the sufferer in a dream and advise him as to the method whereby he may recover.¹ The Hottentots when passing a grave throw an offering upon it asking for the guardianship of the departed spirits. In Central Africa the Dinkas have strong faith in the willingness of their ancestors to come to their support in moments of peril. When they are engaged on such work as the harpooning of a hippopotamus they will cry out: 'O *jok* (spirits) of our ancestors!' and then the *jok* will come, enter their bodies and nerve them for the work, and will remain until the work is done.² The few examples just given will serve to open our eyes to the nature of the services rendered by the dead, and will still further show that the ghost is not always a sort of vampire, a veritable terror to the neighbourhood which it haunts, driving the people almost mad with fright. If that were the case, the various offerings made to it would be so many contrivances to get rid of it. Of course a ghost may, and as a matter of fact sometimes does, appear in diabolical guise, making havoc all round, but there is reason for this. It is retaliating on those who were harsh and cruel to the living man. It is

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 143.

² *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iv, p. 708.

wreaking vengeance now that it has the power and the opportunity. In a word, its vicious mood has not been acquired in its new sphere, but has been carried with it from the old.

A point has now been reached where something must be said about the position held by the ghost and the god relatively to each other. Have they each their own peculiar properties, easily discernible and marking them off as belonging to two distinct classes? Or, are they in all essential qualities the same, differing, if they do differ, only as we see men differ in possessing less or more intelligence and power? Some scholars say No! to the first question and Yes! to the second, and are able to bring forward a considerable mass of evidence in favour of their view. Apart altogether from the fact that the god and the ghost are beings of a spiritual texture, they are approached with similar feelings of awe and respect; they receive the same offerings and are credited with the power to bestow the same benefits. In view of this it is contended that ghost-worship preceded the worship of the gods. Men knew of the ghosts and were engaged in placating them before they ever dreamed of the existence of high supernatural beings. The latter, it is suspected, are themselves spirits of ancestors who through various circumstances have grown in importance, and have come to loom large in the imagination of the people. The memory of distinguished men did not easily fade. On the contrary, the story of their exploits passing from mouth to mouth received continual additions and embellishments, until in the end it appeared that no mere mortal could have accomplished so much. Thus to their

ghosts were accorded the highest honours. They are wreathed with a halo of divinity. 'Anything which transcends the ordinary a savage thinks of as supernatural or divine; the remarkable man among the rest—regarded with awe during his life, he is regarded with increased awe after his death: and the propitiation of his ghost develops into an established worship.'¹ A simple and plausible way this of showing how belief in gods originated and grew to maturity. But will it stand the test of unvarnished facts? The facts briefly are these:

(a) There are no races of men who worship ancestors to the entire exclusion of worship or homage to any higher being. Worship of the departed, it is true, is so predominant in some places, e.g. among the Zulus, as to produce in the casual observer the impression that what are really gods are non-existent.

The Zulus and the Indians of Guiana are constantly held up as samples of peoples who know of no god, but who are inveterate believers in the reality and influence of the spirits of the dead. The question of importance is this. Have the religious beliefs and ceremonies of these people been so thoroughly scrutinized as to enable us to say without more ado that they have no god who has not been at one time a spirit dwelling in a human body? It would be a rash statement to make. Indeed something very like a god has been found both among the Zulus and the Indians of Guiana. The former have 'Unkulunkulu', a being who would be more correctly represented by 'creator' or 'first father' than by 'ancestral spirit'. The latter have the 'One in the sky', who is more

naturally explained as a spirit never incarnated in a human body.¹

(b) The two worships, that of the gods and that of the ancestors, are seen to be going on side by side in a large number of cases. The ghosts do not monopolize the religious devotion, the gods come in for a fair share. This is even acknowledged unintentionally by Mr. Herbert Spencer, the great champion of the theory that the gods are only developed ghosts. 'With the Malayo-Polyne-sians, in addition to simple ancestor-worship there usually coexists a more developed worship of *remoter ancestors*, who have become deities. Sacrificing to their gods the Tahitians also sacrifice to the spirits of the departed chiefs and kindred.'² We have italicized the words 'remoter ancestors' as they express not a fact but a mere opinion which is pressed into the service of a theory. Is it likely that two kinds of worship of the dead should be carried on at the same time and in the same place? The mere mention of it is enough to indicate its improbability. The fact of the matter is, that of the two kinds of worship one was reserved for spirits. The two worships proceed on parallel lines, and it is therefore a fair inference that the one is not an offshoot from the other, that the god was never a man's ghost. Were it otherwise there would be no reason why the two systems of worship should not coalesce once more. In England to-day more than one religious denomination has cut itself off from the established church, but a prospect of reunion at some future time is not unlikely. The same thing cannot be

¹ Cf. A. Lang, *Making of Religion*, pp. 204 ff.

² *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i, p. 282.

said of the cult of the dead and the worship of the gods. They remain distinct. No hope of their fusion is possible. The gods will not allow themselves to be depressed into glorified ancestors, nor will the ancestral spirits, with few exceptions, succeed in attaining to that high position which will entitle them to divine adoration and worship.

Look at the Dinka, a rude race. They are careful not to confuse the human and the supernatural spirits. In their prayers the god Dengdit is mentioned first and foremost, and then the *joké* of their ancestors.¹ With them we may compare the Romans who at their *sacra* commemorated first the gods, and then the shades of the departed. These instances can be taken as typical.

(c) If further proof were necessary that the root of religion must not be sought in ghost-worship, we have it in the idea persistently simmering in the minds of aborigines that the gods are beings who never die. Death has no dominion over them. Whether they had a beginning is a more doubtful matter. At any rate they created everything that exists, man as well as beast. Death, a late intruder into our world, lays its cold, iron hand on created things alone and not on the gods. An old Eskimo of Greenland was but venting, or giving articulate expression to a vague but prevalent feeling among primitive people, when he told a missionary: 'Certainly there must be some Being who made all these things. He must be very good too. Ah, did I but know him!' ²

One may justly conclude that the religious instinct of man is not totally satisfied with the sustenance extended

¹ *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iv, p. 707.

² A. Lang, *Making of Religion*, p. 184.

to it by the cult of the dead. This cult is a makeshift at the best ; it keeps a man from religious starvation ; it preserves the religious sense from blight and atrophy. For a time a man may conceivably perform religious duties to his ancestor and to no one else ; but he soon finds that the nourishment thence derived is not adequate. The soul clamours for more and gets it in the worship of the gods. A significant fact well worth mentioning is the lack of anything of the nature of proper ghost-worship among the aborigines of Australia. The very names of the departed are not allowed to be uttered.¹ Such reticence, it is obvious, would give little encouragement to the growth of ancestor-worship. Evidently the Australian natives do not gratify their religious instincts by means of the cult of the dead. If they are in need of spiritual comfort and help they find them elsewhere. So far then as man's religious feeling is concerned, either it asks for more food than is supplied it by ancestral worship, or it may dispense with that worship altogether.

¹ A. Lang, *Magic and Religion*, p. 57.

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION AND PROGRESS

BEFORE going on to weigh the contribution which religion has made to the progress of early man, we must endeavour to define the meaning of religion in this connexion. It has not, of course, the same content and signification among uncivilized people that it has among ourselves. Christians are so accustomed to the belief in one true and righteous God, who has revealed Himself in His Son Jesus Christ, and is still speaking through His Spirit in the hearts of men, that they are apt to refuse the name of religion to any system of belief or practice at variance with this. Yet religion must be assumed to have a wider and somewhat different meaning, unless primitive man is excluded from the category of religious beings. He is more at home with a faith in a multitude of gods or spirits almost equal in power, than he is with a faith in some far-off transcendent god without a peer.

Among groups of very degraded aborigines the latter type of belief exists, but it exists as a vague rumour, having as a rule scant influence on the people among whom it circulates.¹ In fact they are too dwarfed in mind to conceive clearly the supernatural as one, sole,

¹ e. g. Unkulunkulu, the 'high god' of the Zulus, and Puluga, of the Andamans.

unequalled agent in the universe. He is divided into several beings, who dwell in a mysterious world lying close to this. Men wishing to have dealings with that world may address themselves to one particular spirit there resident, but they would be far from imagining him to be the solitary occupant of the place. That other world is crowded with capricious spirits, most of them unkind, and even malevolent, and it is the purpose of religion to prevent them from doing mischief, and to draw out the generosity of those who are favourably inclined and wrest favours from them.

Religion stands on the confines between the two worlds, rendering possible and facilitating communication between the inhabitants of both.

Fear. Men, it is said, in the beginning were driven by fear to embrace a simple form of religion. That may or may not be true. Certainty on the point can hardly be obtained. Yet there is one fact which is true, generally speaking, of all races in a backward state of development, and that is that they are like children walking in the dark, easily scared and put out of countenance by any strange, uncanny appearance or sound, which is at once interpreted by them as the work of undesirable visitants belonging to a higher order of existence. To-day in uncivilized parts of the world the natives are extremely susceptible to fright. A sudden blow on the outside of a tent of the Samoyeds will, according to the traveller Castren, throw the occupants into spasms.¹ 'The Indian lived in perpetual fear. The turning of a leaf, the crawling of an insect, the cry of a bird, the creaking of

¹ D. G. Brinton, *Primitive Religions*, p. 14.

a bough, might be to him the mystical signal of weal or woe.'¹ To this might be added the words of Herr Warneck addressed to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, 1910: 'Primitive man has to wind his way amid the throng of the souls of the people around him, and must continually bargain or fight with invincible and sinister powers,—the Battak is like a man driven in a frenzied pursuit round and round.'²

How shall man wrench himself free of the terrifying nightmare which saddens his life, prevents real growth in any department of his nature, nay, rather paralyses and frustrates the good that is in him? There are two alternatives before him. He may present himself before the authors of the trouble, coax and cajole them to keep away and desist from mischief. Or he may secure a friend among the spirits, a god in fact, who will aid him to disarm his opponents and put them to flight. Only the latter method can strictly be called religious, and it has availed far more powerfully than the other to disperse the terrors and bogies of all sorts that have been conjured up by the imagination of early man. It has enabled him to breathe more freely, to while away his brief existence with a larger measure of ease and comfort. He is emancipated thereby from the thralldom of excessive fear.

Friendly If religion conferred only the negative
gods. boon of deliverance from the assaults of evil spirits, and a cessation of the tumult of fear in man's

¹ E. Westermarck, *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, p. 613.

² *Conference Report*, vol. iv.

heart, it achieved a noble work. But that is a small item in its total contribution to the progress of early races. It has provided them with positive blessings. It has drawn to their notice the existence of kindly spirits stronger, more privileged than themselves, whose good will and co-operation can be ensured by a rightly and duly ordered approach. Take the simple heathen who worships a piece of wood or stone which he carries about with him. It is his fetish, a symbol and a vehicle of a supernatural power. 'The heathen armed with his fetish feels strong. He believes in it; has faith that it will help him. He can see it and feel it. He goes on his errand with confidence of success—the Christian convert is weak in his faith. He would like something tangible. He is not sure that he will succeed in his errand. He goes at it somewhat half-hearted and probably fails.'¹ Here we have men of a low type in possession of friendly gods or spirits when they were first visited by Europeans, and hence it would be a case of pure assumption to assert without valid proofs that religion has everywhere and always been the offspring of fear, that people being over-nervous have called it into existence that it might act as a fearless companion to them in a dangerous world. The people of the Cape Coast won a victory over their enemies on one occasion, and thinking that their good luck was not due to their own prowess alone, and that some spirit in the neighbourhood had fought with them, they chose him as an object of worship.² Thus the god became an ally mighty

¹ R. H. Nassau, *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 112.

² Cf. F. B. J. ...

in operation. He goes alongside of his people, infuses confidence into them, and lends them substantial assistance in their various undertakings.

The man who embarks on his toils and labours unaided is not likely to get through with them so efficiently and successfully as the man who believes the god to be co-operating with him. He is rather prone to yield to impatience and despair before his work is half done. Thrown on his own resources the member of a low race is helpless and cowardly enough. If he were appointed to perform a duty which is not beyond his capacity, he might still fail at it through a want of little courage and self-confidence. In league with a spirit or god, on the other hand, he is a different man. He is daring, hopeful, and throws himself into his tasks convinced that they are not too hard for him. This must always be the temper and mood of the progressive man, who moves ahead scorning and triumphing over difficulties, and drawing his fellows after him. But to be of that temper of mind he must first feel sure that the god is with him, nerving his arm and baffling his enemies' designs. On the eve of war may be heard the urgent petition of the Nootka Indians: 'Good or great god, let me live, not be sick, find the enemy, not fear him.'¹ The native of Kansas, when about to fight his enemy, says, facing the East: 'I wish to pass along the road to the foe, O Wakanda! I promise you a blanket if I succeed;' and turning to the West: 'O Wakanda! I promise you a feast if I succeed.'²

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 160.

Success in hunting and fishing is similarly represented as attending the efforts of the man aided by the powers above. A Dakotah, when going hunting, utters the prayer: 'Spirits or ghosts, have mercy on me, and show me where I can find a deer!' The Baganda fisherman after the line is ready 'goes to the god, asks his blessing on it. In return he receives from the deity a stick or bit of wood to fasten to the line, and also some medicine of herbs to smoke and blow over the water in order that the fish may come to the line and be caught.'¹ Far be it from us to hint that rude man would not have risked his life in conflicts with enemies, or would have refused to go in quest of food whether it be to the wood or stream, if his god had been as heedless and irresponsible as Baal of old, or if his existence had been unknown. What seems to be incontestable is that he prosecutes and has prosecuted his duties, with more ardour, perseverance, and hope of success, under the influence of the feeling that he is not alone in the struggle, but that above him there is a power whose supernatural weapons are employed on his behalf.

Industry. The savage is not only timid and lacking in grit and self-reliance, he is an exceptionally lazy being. He does not care much for work that entails exertion, and his time he would waste away in fruitless inactivity were he not pressed by hunger or some external authority to be up and doing. Indeed in hot, fertile districts where nature is lavish of her good things with small assistance from man, the natives, inasmuch as there is no demand for labour, are habituated to a life of

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, p. 194.

indolent ease. They eat bread without having to sweat for it. 'The Malays are fond of a slothful life, because persevering toil is unnecessary, or would bring them no additional enjoyments.'¹ Laziness, however, is not a characteristic of inhabitants of fertile tracts alone. It is apt to creep over people everywhere. They prefer idleness to labour if they can persuade or constrain others to toil for them. The Australian natives, according to Mr. Howitt, although they may exert themselves with vigour when hunting or fishing, find prolonged labour with the object of securing ultimate gain distasteful.² But man must put his body in motion and strain his muscle if he would survive at all, unless nature is generous enough to bring supplies to his door. Ordinarily nature is not so sparing of man. She meets him half-way, and if he does not take the trouble to fulfil his part of the transaction she leaves him to starve. There are few men who would rather perish of hunger than stir a hand or foot to help themselves to some food. The Namaquas in Africa must be taken as exceptions: 'They may be seen basking in the sun for days together, in listless inactivity, frequently almost perishing from thirst or hunger—"Why should we," they say, "resemble the worms of the ground?"'³ Laziness, it is true, is a vice which, when it has been allowed to grow, and take complete possession of people, can only with difficulty be shaken off. When they are confronted with the choice between exertion and starvation they will bestir themselves just sufficiently to induce

¹ E. Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, p. 269.

² *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, p. 259.

or force others to shoulder their burdens for them and bear the heat of the day. In early society indolence and shirking are evils which must be discouraged and placed under the ban of public opinion with its traditions and rules.

The youths at the time of their initiation among the Western Islanders of Torres Straits were told: 'You work hard to get plenty fish and dugong and turtle. You make gardens, then you full up of food.' A youth on the Eastern Islands 'must not spend his days on the reef catching fish and neglect his garden; he might go on the reef once a week or so. He was strictly enjoined to make a good and large garden, and was taught the best method'.¹ According to Dr. Haddon the code of ethical rules with which the novice of the Torres Straits Islands was made familiar at his initiation derived no support or sanction from religion. It had only the force of public opinion behind it, and the youth was instigated to respect it lest he should bring himself into notoriety in the public eye. This is not the place to enter on a discussion of the process of initiation in early society and to ascertain how far religion controlled the proceedings. That has been already done. Numerous instances could be produced of initiation ceremonies in which religion is certainly to the fore. There is the voice of the bull-roarer, the voice of the god Baiame, impressing the imagination of the youth at the Australian ceremony. Mr. Nassau in his *Fetichism in West Africa* tells us of the conspicuous part played by Malanda, a mysterious power or spirit, in the initiation of boys in the French

Congo.¹ It is hardly necessary to mention the reality and profundity of the effect produced on the mind of the lad by the suggestion that he is being watched by a mighty superhuman agent able to mark every departure from the rules and customs now taught him. There is no escape from the all-seeing eye of that agent. The youth who breaks the law may not be found out by the community, but he cannot be refractory with an easy conscience if he believes his every action to be observed by a spirit.² The Sea-Dyaks of Borneo have a god, Petara, the creator of the world, who is stated to approve of industry. They are not particularly industrious, but cannot afford to disregard what is pleasing to their god, and hence engage in toil partly on that account. Look again at the Greenlanders. It is through the sweat of their faces that they eat bread. The necessities of life are not obtained except through laborious efforts. The laggard and the indolent are therefore disgraced, while the active and hard-working are held in high esteem. And in order to supply them with an additional stimulus to perseverance, there is held out to them the assurance that 'the industrious man will have a very happy existence after death'.³

Mention might also be made of the necessity and importance of religion to the commercial traveller, the exchange dealer, of rude societies. The strange lands which he visited were full of superstitious and ghostly terrors to him, and his safety depended on the favour of

¹ Cf. F. B. Jevons, *Religion in Evolution*, pp. 21 f.

² Cf. G. B. Foster, *The Function of Religion*, pp. 153-4.

³ Cf. E. Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, pp. 271-2.

the gods of the land whom he conciliated by the offer of various dainties.

Passing on from the labours of primitive man which are a part and parcel of his outer life to a consideration of the labours of his inner life, the life of his soul, in which the struggle for improvement in morals takes place, we find the influence of religion to be still more striking. The first forward step in the moral region is only possible to him when he learns to put a check on the wild and unbridled passions of the animal within him. In his breast are a host of surging desires which he has no force of himself to restrain. He is wellnigh passive under their influence, impelled and mastered by the predominant motive. The desire to load himself with spoils and scalps of enemies, to indulge his sexual passions, or to gorge himself with food, or to take away other people's goods, is a peculiarity of all the lower types of men. The disposition, on the other hand, to be kind, tender, and unselfish is not entirely absent, but is tardy in growth, and requires much care and cultivation before it can attain to strength and maturity. Such is the state of early man, and it would have remained his state were there no elevating and refining factors at work. These factors may all be comprehended under the term asceticism, a discipline which seems to be as ancient as man himself. It will be interesting to notice to what extent the motives of the ascetic were religious.

Fasting. One of the most prominent of man's self-denying ordinances is fasting, abstention from food or

apparent why uncivilized man should submit to the unpleasant ordeal of self-denial in the matter of food. He very often has himself no clear explanation to offer. There are, however, a few facts which seem open to little question. Some kinds of diet are held to be weakening and defiling. We have had occasion to observe how prevalently the flesh of the more timid animals is repudiated. To consume such food would render the eater himself timid and cowardly. This reason probably weighs with the warrior who before going forth to meet his enemy in battle is very sparing in his diet, and also with the hunter who believes that his success in the chase will depend very largely upon a preliminary period of fasting. At any rate his avoidance of women at this juncture can have no other meaning.

But the warrior and the fisherman do not merely refuse the weakening kinds of food, as far as possible they abstain altogether during the stage of preparation. By this rigid sacrifice of the wants of his body, man, one would imagine, would incapacitate himself to such an extent as to be totally unfit for any arduous duties. What does he mean by thus reducing himself to a condition bordering on starvation? It can only be because he thinks that food will hinder him in his avocation.

Food, as early man views it, is both nourishing and harmful. It is harmful because at a critical moment in his life it may convey an evil or deleterious influence into the body. It carries infection with it as certainly as disease does. The woman in child-birth, the bridal pair, and mourners are similarly proceeding through a crisis, during which the regulations as to their diet are extremely

stringent. While in this condition they are peculiarly susceptible of hurtful and dangerous influence. Food that is suspected is therefore *taboo* to them, and the kind that is taken must be as it were sterilized. Their very condition is also fraught with peril to others. Their hands, in fact all parts of their body, discharge a substance which infects and pollutes everything it touches, so that they must not put their fingers on the food they eat. It should be passed to their mouths by means of a stick. This is somewhat of a digression, but it should be borne in mind by any one who tries to estimate the share of religion in inducing man to restrain his bodily appetites. He fasts and is squeamish as to his diet. How far does he repress his desire for food from religious motives? Certainly, so far as the flesh of certain animals is concerned, his action is due to the belief that it contains a sacred mysterious element. It is eaten only on rare and solemn occasions, and in a sacramental manner. Now places, animals, and men that are deemed sacred and holy owe their peculiar distinction to the fact that a divine being is in some way connected or present with them.

Nothing is sacred except that with which the god has been or is associated. The sanctity of the animal or place is the creation of man's religious sense, which has there perceived the home of a god. In the presence of a sacred animal, or while sojourning in a holy spot, man is under the spell of a mysterious restraint, and involuntarily bridles his desires. 'The sacred spots of the Central Australians were generally caves. Everything in such spots, and their immediate neighbourhood is sacred; nothing must

there. The very animals that run thither are safe from the hunter. No native would dare to spear a kangaroo or wallaby on the holy ground. Within its limits men too are safe from their pursuers.¹

It was not unusual for man to fast from a wish to win his way into the esteem of his god, and come away dowered with rare privileges. He left his home, parted with his friends, and penetrated into the bush or other solitary place. There he lived deprived of food for days. At length beginning to be delirious, he obtained visions in which he held converse with the deity, and received from him power to heal the sick, and perform other remarkable feats. On returning to his home he put into practice the secrets he had learned.² It will be objected that he is the victim of an illusion. Well, that may be so, yet during his absence he has acquired some advantages. He has for the time being summoned up the energy and resolve necessary to lift him above a base servitude to the wants of the moment. The lesson he has learned is surely not absolutely forgotten; it cannot fail to leave a permanent effect for good upon him. His feet are now planted on the path of progress, and it only requires little further light and stimulus to urge him along. During the remainder of this chapter we might well occupy ourselves with a study of his conduct in certain situations.

Theft. A. Réville in his *Prolegomena to the History of Religions* remarks that 'every man has an innate

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i, p. 96; cf. also W. W. Skeat, *Malay Magic*, p. 64.

² E. Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, p. 292; cf. also C. Hill-Tout, *British North America*, p. 174.

tendency to appropriate everything within his reach which can procure him comfort. As far as that goes every man is the plunderer of his neighbour'.¹ It is a somewhat sweeping generalization. Yet unquestionably many sections of the race exhibit the quality of a covetous disposition, and are ever ready to pilfer a piece of property which takes their fancy. The savage is addicted to theft, more so than the civilized man, because his moral sense being weak and immature, he is unaware of the wickedness of the act. Still he is not allowed to do what he likes with other people's property. If he steals an article and is caught, he has to restore the property and pay a fine in addition. There are instances where the thief is put to death either by the community or by the angry powers above. It should be remarked that though the thief may stand in dread of the penalties threatened by the public, he may still persevere in his nefarious business trusting to his own ingenuity to elude the vigilance of human authorities. It is in cases of this kind that religion is principally of value. Crimes and misdemeanours which escape the cognizance of the public do not pass unnoticed by the powers above. On the Gold Coast 'if a man had property stolen from his house he was to go to the priest of the local deity, state the loss that had befallen him, make an offering of a fowl, rum, and eggs, and ask the priest to supplicate the god to punish the thief'.² Mongalinto, the god of the Bechuanas, punishes thieves by striking them with lightning. 'Among the Masai a person who is accused of cattle-lifting and

¹ p. 199.

² E. Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, p. 60.

on that account subjected to the ordeal of drinking a mixture of blood and milk, has first to swear: 'O God, I drink this blood, if I have stolen the cattle this blood will kill me.'¹ It is the opinion of Westermarck that the solemn mention of a god's name in the formula of an oath proves only that the god is a passive ally of the person invoking him; and that he cannot be regarded as the guardian and vindicator of morals. From this view we dissent. If the god is a mere tool, he is not a tool that can be applied to the fulfilment of *any* design contemplated by the sweafer of the oath. The tool is actually used for the punishment of offenders, but not for the condonation or reward of a culprit. The god is invoked to vindicate the right, and not to give such a verdict as the suppliant desires. Perhaps the individual may flatter himself that the god is accommodating and indulgent, but such is not the belief of the community as a whole. The god named in the oath and called to witness is expected to defend the right. Indeed there are oaths which have no divine name connected with them, and yet the oath is relied upon to work out its dread results. It is self-acting like *taboo*. It is, in fact, a branch of the system of taboo. Dr. Codrington who has written on the *Melanesians* describes a *taboo* as 'A prohibition with a curse expressed or implied'.² A person wishing to protect his fruit trees, plaits some cocoa-nut leaflets in the form of a sea-pike, and suspends it from one or more of the trees. His implied curse is that a sea-pike will dart through the body of the thief. The system of taboo

¹ E. Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, p. 687.

which is widespread, and particularly prominent in some of the Australasian Islands, is indisputably the result of the action of the religious and ethical instinct of man. He may not have the faintest idea why a thing is taboo, he only has a feeling that it is steeped in mystery and must not be touched. And it is a feeling which has effectually kept the lustful and cruel instincts of mankind within bounds.

Adultery. Incestuous connexions are almost universally condemned in uncivilized society. There exists an abhorrence of them which seems to arise as naturally as the reluctance of man to eat unclean or forbidden food. Some writers regard the abhorrence not as a *natural* feeling, but as the effect of the constitution of early communities. Men live in small groups, and every woman of the group is the property of the whole, and hence must not be appropriated by any man of her clan. If he wants a wife he must go and look outside his own group.¹ In this way, it is alleged, there grew up a strong opposition against sexual intercourse between men and women bound together by the tie of kinship. It appears to us, however, to be a truer explanation to say that the system itself whereby a man must not view a woman of his kin in the light of a prospective wife is simply an expression of the moral and religious nature of people. They hate such alliances because the voice of the highest side of their being is against them. How is it otherwise possible to account for the misgivings of the Kafirs? They maintain that the offspring of an incestuous union will be a monster, as a 'punishment inflicted by the ancestral spirit'. Similarly a long drought, which is understood

¹ Vide Lord Avebury, *Marriage, Totemism, and Religion*, p. 39.

to be due to a spirit's anger, is a decisive proof to the Bataks of Sumatra that two cousins have had criminal intercourse with each other.¹

Not of course that licentiousness and profligacy are absent from early society. In fact there is abundance of it in some parts. Boys and girls before they are married live very freely together, the girl being *noa* (common) before she is joined in wedlock. But even then certain restrictions are imposed on her freedom. They amount to this, that the girl is made to consider herself a more worthy and suitable bride if she keeps herself chaste. If it is proved that she has had illicit dealings previously, her value in the matrimonial market is depreciated, and so her parents will be simply consulting their own interests by preserving her chastity inviolate. After marriage she is *taboo* and is prohibited to any but her husband.² It would be as perilous to wrong her as it would be to touch a corpse or the person of the king. The act of bravado would instantly avenge itself, and might strike a mortal blow.

Religion, as has been already observed, is not unconnected with the taboo and may legitimately claim some of the honours due to the taboo for the beneficial effects produced. According to the Maoris of New Zealand an *atua* (spirit) empowers the taboo to deal out its measures of correction and punishment.³ One might

¹ E. Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, p. 376; cf. also Hose and McDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, vol. ii, p. 198.

² F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to Religion*, p. 72.

³ Dr. Codrington in *The Melanesians* says that the power at the back of the taboo is 'that of the ghost or spirit in whose name, or in reliance upon whom, it is pronounced', p. 215.

have thought that this organization would have exercised a sufficient deterrent against sexual indiscretions, and that there was no need for any god to throw in his weight into the scale against immorality. Early man did not think so. Behind and above all human authority was the god who in course of time assumed the responsibility of enforcing the prohibitions of taboo, and wreaked his vengeance on any infraction of them. The god was especially severe against such a heinous offence as adultery. Petara, the god of the Sea Dyaks of Borneo, sends a plague of rain upon the earth when a married man or woman has been unfaithful. The Karens of Burma have a like belief. They say that the god of heaven and earth is angry with them for intrigues of this description, and shows his indignation by blasting their crops.¹ Why people should imagine that irregular relations between the sexes have far-reaching consequences in the very mechanism of external nature, and cause serious disturbances of the elements, is not very clear. To Dr. Frazer it is an insoluble enigma, a riddle of the Sphinx. But are we not justified in postulating for the lowest type of man a rudimentary form of moral and religious instinct? If so, that instinct must make itself felt in some manner. And is it not likely that there is exhibited in men's disapproval of illicit unions the protest of the moral sense? So far as we can see, this is the only satisfactory explanation of the problem. The belief that nature itself is stirred to arms when men transgress sex laws is the fruit of the religious instinct.

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, pp. 31 ff.

Murder. Respect for the life of near relatives and acquaintances is the rule in primitive society, and may be due in the first instance to utilitarian motives. A man refrains from harming or killing a member of his group because his support is so very essential to people struggling for dear life. In the hard fight for existence the human pack must live in harmony and at peace with one another. Otherwise they would soon be destroyed by the common enemy which watches its opportunity for attack. But the life of a kinsman is important from another point of view. A small village is made up of inhabitants who have the same totem mark. They have the same animal, plant, or what not, as their sacred object, their genius. Now if it is an animal that they venerate, they say that the animal as well as themselves are descended from a far-off common animal ancestor, and that the same blood runs through the veins of both. Hence if a man who sheds the blood of the totem is guilty of sacrilege so is the murderer of a kinsman. Indeed a man's conduct towards his fellow man is scarcely distinguishable from conduct towards his totem.¹ Hence arises at any rate within the totem clans an effective check to murderous tendencies.

On the other hand, it is legitimate to kill a stranger without compunction so long as the machinations of his ghost can be avoided. But this security is not easily attained. Perhaps the safest proceeding consists in removal from the territory of the stranger and submission to certain purifications on reaching home. The ghost of a murdered kinsman is also a force to be reckoned

with by the fellow who has ill-treated him while living. We have before mentioned that the natives of the Upper Congo would not thrust away a man suffering from sleeping sickness from fear of the vengeance of his ghost.¹ But since the ghost in time either loses its power or is forgotten, the murderer who can keep out of its reach for some time may breathe freely again.

It is questionable whether the scruples of religion or the terrors of the ghost have had the greater effect in discouraging homicide. Any one who glances through a work like that of Westermarck on *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* will, we think, come to the conclusion that the god is as hard on the murderer as is the ghost. The supreme god, Leza, among the Awemba rewards the good, while he punishes murderers as well as thieves and adulterers.² A Fuegian told Admiral Fitzroy: 'Rain come down—snow come down—wind blow, blow. Very bad to kill man. Big man in woods no like it, he very angry.' The 'big man' in the woods can only be another name for a supernatural being, or some supernatural power or influence.³

Since religion nearly always stands somewhere in the background of life, appeal is made for its sanction when other authority is not adequate. It may be called a court of final appeal to which are taken causes impossible of settlement in any other way, and to which the attention of the unruly is drawn when lesser methods fail to keep him straight. Mr. Nassau gives an instance much to the

¹ Chap. iii, p. 53.

² E. Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, vol. ii, p. 686.

³ Cf. R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, p. 16.

point. Among the Negro tribe of the Bight of Benin there is a power named Egbo, or Ukuku. If other means had failed, tribes and native chiefs invoked it in order that necessary laws might be passed and quarrels composed. Egbo was a secret society of men organized under the influence of a spirit.¹

We have endeavoured to estimate the effect of religion on early people as they strive to move upwards, and evidence is not lacking that in all affairs of life it has been a power for good. From the mind and heart of man it has partly lifted the paralysing obsession of fear. It has furthered industry by the promise of rewards to the worker. In the sphere of morals the man of attainments is he who knows how to deny himself, to curb his inordinate desires, his covetousness and thirst for blood. Religion is a school of discipline in which he has learned many lessons which, there can be no doubt, were indispensable to him in his efforts after self-mastery. Deprived of the support of religion in his arduous ascent, he would continually have slipped back to the level whence he had started.

¹ *Fetichism in West Africa*, pp. 139, 140.

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